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**Cultural Identity, Vocational Development, and the Meaning of Work among Appalachian
Coal Miners: A Qualitative Study**

Susan Chamberlain

**Dissertation submitted
to the College of Education and Human Services
at West Virginia University**

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy in
Counseling Psychology**

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**Morgantown, West Virginia
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**Keywords: Appalachia, culture, identity, vocational development, psychology of work, coal
miners**

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ABSTRACT

Cultural Identity, Vocational Development, and the Meaning of Work among Appalachian Coal Miners: A Qualitative Study

Susan Chamberlain

In this study I explore what coal mining means to underground miners in Appalachia, and how these meanings interact with participants' cultural and vocational identities. Using narrative data from eight underground coal miners, the study investigates the connections between cultural values, career, and personality. These connections are singularly intertwined in Appalachia, where economic and social landscapes have been heavily influenced by coal mining for over a century. The resulting relationships have blurred the lines of identity among career, family, and community. This qualitative study is based on data from semi-structured interviews; participant language was analyzed using grounded theory to create a theory of cultural and vocational development while also exploring the meaning of work. In exploring the core concept of underground coal mining in Appalachia, early knowledge of coal mining and early explorations of options and values emerged as significant influential conditions. Demographic factors, personality, and individual vocational development emerged as contextual factors. In addition, four intervening conditions (experienced miner development, work-home balance, disadvantages of mining, and pride) impacted participants' conceptualizations of the meanings of coal mining. Ultimately, six branches of meaning became apparent: mining as family, mining as survival/power, mining as self-determining, mining as social connection, mining as personal identity, and mining as cultural identity. Each of the above components is described in participants' own language and contexts. Clinical implications, limitations and strengths, and recommendations for future research are discussed.

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CHAPTER 1

The cultural identity of the Appalachian region is both directly and indirectly linked to work. Since the mid-nineteenth century, the coal fields of Appalachia have dominated the vocational, economic, political, and folkloric landscapes of the region. While jobs in mining have been on the decline (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2013), it still provides an important revenue stream for many Appalachian counties, and the historical presence of “company towns” continues to reverberate in the social, educational, and political hierarchies of modern towns and cities. Families celebrate coal mining traditions that extend several generations, and the value of labor is a core cultural virtue that extends the bond between the people and the land. However, the industry’s history of exploitation and physical dangers continues to influence the regional consciousness. Most recently, these issues became particularly salient after the Upper Big Branch mine disaster, which killed 29 West Virginia coal miners in 2010, and which added to a national conversation about the use of fossil fuels (Lustgarten & Kusnetz, 2011; Walls & Billings, 2002; United Mine Workers of America, 2011). Nevertheless, being a coal miner continues to be deeply meaningful to the men and women of Appalachia, even to those who have never worked in the industry. Though explorations of vocation have deep roots in the field of counseling psychology, there is a general lack of research on working-class men and women, particularly among those who perform heavy labor (Blustein, 2006; Fouad & Brown, 2000). This deficit is reflected in the lack of research on vocational identity among coal miners in Appalachia, and on how the meaning of work influences and is influenced by the Appalachian culture.

Appalachia comprises parts of thirteen states between southern New York and northern Mississippi. Though predominately White/Caucasian, the region presents a unique mix of racial

and ethnic backgrounds, and people from the region are often most easily recognized by their distinctive dialect. An examination of how people of the region characterize themselves, rather than of how they are characterized by others, reveals a culture defined by core collectivist values. These cultural principles often diverge from mainstream, individualistic American values by focusing on issues of egalitarianism, self-sacrifice, and the significance of the social, rather than the individual, good. These values are evidenced in a number of contexts, including the use of land and resources, communication styles, gender roles, educational attainment, substance use, employment, and vocational choice. While studies in anthropology and sociology have connected Appalachian cultural values to each of these areas, psychologists have yet to explore the function of culture in creating personal and communal meanings among these people. In a region striving to break free from stereotypes of poverty and exploitation, the psychological meanings of work may hold a key to the growth of the region.

For centuries, Appalachia has been unfairly plagued by negative images of the land and its people. Often stereotyped as poor and uneducated by mainstream America, Appalachian “hillbillies” are commonly depicted as either bootleggers or coal miners. Neither of these occupations is assumed to provide a safe milieu for self-expression, personal enrichment, or meaning-making. People of the region are sharply aware of these stereotypes and have fought to disseminate a more realistic understanding of the region’s rich culture; however, sociological and population research has shown that such stereotypes may influence career decision-making and lead to migration out of the region to find other occupational opportunities (Christiadi, 2011; Towers, 2005). Thus, as a point of both pride and controversy, mining continues to simultaneously unite and divide Appalachians¹.

¹ People from the region rarely identify themselves as “Appalachian,” preferring to identify themselves by state or using the terms “mountain people,” “mountaineers,” “plain folk,” or “country people,” (Keefe, 2005; Otto, 2007).

While there have been several studies examining career choice in the region, there have been no investigations into the connections among cultural identity, vocational development, and the meaning of work among Appalachian people. As stated by Blustein (2006):

Working . . . has a unique meaning that is derived from and embedded within specific cultural contexts, which shape and are shaped by individual experiences of working . . . that contribute to the overall social and economic welfare of a given culture. (p. 3)

In his overview of work and the Appalachian economy, Shannon (2006) echoed this sentiment, stating that, “Much of the history, cultural development, and folklore, as well as the social problems, of Appalachia can be traced directly or indirectly to its economy,” (p. 67). As numerous examples from both popular and scholarly media can attest, coal mining is one of the few careers that has mainstream acceptance as not only a vocation, but a cultural force. However, explorations of this connection in the psychological literature are non-existent, and the construct of meaning-making among blue collar workers continues to be underrepresented (Blustein, 2006; Liu & Ali, 2005).

As counseling psychologists seek to provide better services for traditionally underrepresented populations, they have become more focused on incorporating multicultural contexts in research, theory, and practice (American Psychological Association, 2002; Rieder Bennett, 2008). As psychology’s “fourth force,” the study of multiculturalism has been substantially tied to investigations of individual and group identities (Helms, 1984; Pedersen, 1991; Sue & Sue, 2003). These identities may include (but are not limited to) racial and ethnic identities, sexual and gender identities, regional identities, and class identities. In spite of the apparent differences between individual and group identities, research indicates that they are

Group members may also identify themselves as “hillbillies” or “rednecks” in a reappropriation of what has long been considered a cultural slur; however, people outside the group should refrain from using these terms (Breen & Mohajer, 2008).

inextricably linked. However, when exploring identity in the context of cultural and personal meaning-making, it is necessary not only to understand the scope of one's identity, but also the mechanisms that may underlie group differentiation and identity salience. Major theories of group differentiation include social identity theory, subjective uncertainty reduction theory, optimal distinctiveness theory, and the self-esteem hypothesis. While they have not been explicitly applied to Appalachian culture, a review of several studies highlights the applicability of these theories to people self-identifying as from the region, particularly in the contexts of vocational development and work.

Contemporary perspectives in career psychology advocate strongly for the study of work as central to understanding human behavior within cultural frameworks of meaning among all levels of socio-economic status (Blustein, 2006; Fouad & Brown, 2000; Liu & Ali, 2005; Schultheiss, 2007; Stead, 2004; Young & Collin, 2004). This focus has implications not only for the field, but for the role of psychology in advocating for social justice (Goodman, Liang, Helms, Latta, Sparks & Weintraub, 2004; Vera & Speight, 2003). Unfortunately, theoretical approaches to vocational development have historically been biased towards a white, male, highly educated clientele. While a number of the participants in this study reflect one or more of these identities, they also inhabit a unique intersection of cultures. A brief overview of these theories highlights their strengths and weaknesses when applied to this population (a more in-depth exploration of career development theories will be provided later).

Three schools of career development theories have been highly influential, even in post-modern career theory: trait and factor (or person-environment fit) theories, social learning theories, and developmental theories. Trait and factor theories, such as Holland's (1997) theory of Vocational Personalities and Work Environments or Dawis and Lofquist's (1984) Theory of

Work Adjustment, conceptualize career choices as efforts to fit the needs and interests of workers with those of employers. Each theory assumes that matching worker characteristics to worker environment creates a meaningful work-life. Unfortunately, there are relatively few studies applying these theories to groups from lower socio-economic backgrounds or with limited occupational opportunities.

Social learning theories, on the other hand, have been directly applied to Appalachian career development and educational aspirations. Krumboltz's (1994) social learning theory of career decision making and Lent, Brown, and Hackett's (1994) social cognitive career theory (SCCT) expand upon Bandura's (1977, 1982, 1986) social learning theory to explore what influences and impedes a person's pursuit of certain work choices, as well as to explore how individual and contextual factors influence self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals to create interests, actions, and performance. Among the Appalachian people, SCCT has been particularly useful in researching the educational and vocational aspirations of high school students. However, these studies have had limited applications to those already participating in the labor force, or to those who may choose a career that does not require a college degree.

Developmental theories, such as Super's (1990) life-span, life-space theory and Gottfredson's (1996) theory of circumscription and compromise, conceptualize career as a process, rather than an event. They have typically explored work roles in relation to other life roles and therefore examine occupational roles in a relational context. Developmental theories assume that the interaction among life roles creates a multi-dimensional self-concept. The role of the self-concept is foundational to vocational identity, and therefore developmental theory provides a relatively complex framework within which researchers can explore vocational development in multicultural contexts. A review of the research on vocational identity with

several underrepresented groups (racial/ethnic minorities, gays and lesbians, and people from lower socio-economic classes) provides empirical evidence for a link between cultural identity and vocational identity. While some of the research on class and social status identities may be applicable to Appalachian coal miners, this research is admittedly sparse and limited by questions of generalizability.

Issues of class and social status have contributed to the growth of culturally responsive models that re-define vocational psychology as an instrument for advocacy and social change. Blustein (2006) identified vocational studies as, “the battleground for social justice as working offers us the most direct access to the power structure and to greater equality in opportunities,” (p. 26). Post-modern vocational theory has challenged positivistic research paradigms that focus on individualistic goals and meanings, rather than exploring collectivistic cultures. Feminist theorists introduced a number of new ideas into traditional career theory, including the need to examine work, its meaning, and its impacts from a relational framework. Blustein’s psychology of working model provides just such a framework, particularly in researching issues facing working class individuals. By focusing on the meaning of work within cultural contexts, Blustein applied a post-modern, social constructionist framework to explore work as a means of survival and power, social connection, and self-determination. Among Appalachian coal miners, the psychology of work provides a structure for exploring the meaning of work as created within the relationships of working class individuals.

This study explores the collective dynamics among Appalachian cultural identity, vocational development, and meaning-making among coal miners. The sample was drawn from underground coal miners in West Virginia, and consisted of men and women who identify as being from the Appalachian region. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews.

Given the exploratory nature of this study, as well as the relational constructs being examined, narrative data provided the most accurate descriptions of the concepts in question. In-depth qualitative analysis uncovered a number of components that combined to create a grounded theory. This theory takes into account influential conditions, contextual factors, intervening conditions, actions/interactions, and consequences. While researcher bias in such a study is inevitable, each theoretical component emerged through analysis of participant language, thus avoiding many of the pitfalls of structural bias.

Through qualitative data collection and analysis on the psychological meanings of work, this study has the potential to inform both clinicians and researchers. While one must be careful about generalizing the findings of any exploratory work, clients may benefit from therapeutic work focusing on issues of cultural and vocational identity development, especially as it relates to values-based actions and integrating work-life identities. In particular, the study's findings about the meaning of work may engender fruitful explorations of work in a number of domains (work as family, survival, self-determining, social connection, personal identity, and cultural identity). Finally, as the national conversation around fossil fuels continues to grow, research into the connections between coal mining and the people of the region will be important to easing imminent cultural and vocational shifts in both individual and collective identities.

Literature Review

Appalachia: Geography and Population

As defined by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC; 2011a), Appalachia covers approximately 205,000 square miles that roughly track the length of the eponymous Appalachian Mountains (ARC, 2011a). Running from southern New York to northern Mississippi, the region is comprised of 13 states separated into three subregions: 46 of West Virginia's counties and

parts of New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Ohio are included in *northern Appalachia*; nine of West Virginia's southern counties, eastern Kentucky, southwestern Virginia, and northwestern Tennessee comprise *central Appalachia*; and the rest of Virginia and Tennessee, the western Carolinas and the northern parts of Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi make up *southern Appalachia*. As categorized by the U.S. Census Bureau (n.d.), the bulk of the Appalachian region is incorporated into the Southern (South Atlantic and East South Central) region, with a smaller portion represented by the Northeast (Mid-Atlantic) region. It is also represented in the Midwestern region (East North Central).

In spite of trending toward socio-economic diversification, a large percentage of the region's total population (25,243,456) continues to reside in rural communities (about 42%), which is more than double the national average of rural inhabitants for the country at large (ARC, 2011a). While some areas are economically depressed, others show economic growth on par with the national average. In recognition of the socio-economic diversity of the region, the ARC has assigned four categories of economic development to different counties within the region: *distressed* (mostly in central Appalachia; per capita income < 67% of national average; poverty and unemployment levels < 150% of national average), *transitional* (most of geographical Appalachia; worse than national average economically), *competitive* (unemployment and poverty rates better than national average; per capita incomes 80 – 99% of national average), and *attainment* (equal to national average in terms of income, poverty, and unemployment) (Pollard, 2004). Many areas of Appalachia are economically viable; however, there are pockets of the region that demonstrate “some of the most desperate and persistent poverty found in the United States. . . . [that] consistently equal or exceed those reported in urban areas and even central city ghettos,” (Thorne, Tickamyer, & Thorne, 2004, p. 343). The wide

variety of socio-economic growth throughout the region notwithstanding, the stereotypical image of a poor, rural Appalachia continues unabated in the national consciousness. However, an examination of the region's history and culture highlights a people that are far from homogenous.

Race and ethnicity. The region's heterogeneity is often called into question due to the predominance of the white population: non-Hispanic whites made up 88% of the total population by the year 2000 (Pollard, 2004). By state, racial distribution may be even more homogenous. For example, the most recent U.S. Census reported that persons identifying as white made up 93.9% of the population of West Virginia, followed by those identifying as Black (3.4%), those reporting two or more races (1.5%) and those identifying as having Hispanic or Latino origins (1.2%) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010b). However, people identifying as non-white accounted for nearly half of Appalachia's population growth in the 1990's, which elevated their share of the population to 12%. An examination of the region's economic history contributes to an understanding of the racial and ethnic diversity of the region.

Non-whites have always been present in Appalachia: the area was originally populated by several Native American tribes, most notably the Cherokee, and the resource-rich terrain brought in a racially and ethnically diverse labor force (Pollard, 2004). During the 18th century, Europeans settlers moved in, and the Appalachian economy was driven first by farming, then by livestock, followed by the natural resource industries of timber, salt, iron, and coal (Lewis, 2000; Williams, 2002). As the coal industry grew so did the need to import labor. The coalfields provided an opportunity for people from varying backgrounds to interact, though jobs and living spaces were often segregated. Statistics from the state of West Virginia are particularly telling because the state experienced the greatest industrial growth in the region during the coal boom of

the early 20th century (Lewis, 2000). As reported by the West Virginia Department of Mines, by 1909 the population of miners in coal-driven counties was comprised of 10,910 “Whites” and 8,750 “Blacks” (Lewis, 2000). Among the former, the most common ethnic origin was Italian (3,161) and Hungarian (1,758), with much smaller populations of ethnic Slavs (629), Lithuanians (607), Russians (540), and Germans (165) (Lewis, 2000). Ethnic origins of “Black” miners were not described.

More recently, the Appalachian region has experienced significant growth in ethnically diverse populations and actually had a higher rate of increase than the rest of the country (Pollard, 2004). Pollard’s (2004) report for the ARC’s Population Reference Bureau detailed several possible reasons for this growth, including higher fertility rates among ethnic minorities, and migration into the region. As stated by Pollard:

it has been migration—particularly domestic migration—that has been the key force for Appalachia’s increasing diversity. Migration patterns during both 1995 and 2000 illustrate this point. Twenty-eight percent of Appalachia’s 2.6 million minorities age 5 and older had moved to their county of residence between 1995 and 2000, compared with 17 percent of non-Hispanic whites. (p. 12)

It is important to note that even though gains have been made in non-white racial groups, this growth does not significantly alter the racial balance of the region (Hayden, 2004). However, while Appalachia continues to be predominantly white, the region has experienced persistent increases in diversity that reflect some of the changes in the rest of the country (Hayden, 2004).

Education, employment, and income. Although stereotypically characterized as undereducated and poor, the economic story of the region is far more complex. Recent studies have indicated an increase in both the levels of education and average income in many parts of

the region. However, these data appear to mirror the widening socio-economic gaps around the country, and hide the extreme economic hardships of specific regions, particularly counties in central Appalachia (Eller, 2008). As analyzed by the ARC, the U.S. Census data indicated that between 2005 and 2009, 17.7% of people over age 25 in Appalachia had not achieved a high school diploma (ARC, 2010). Roughly 55% of the population were high school graduates, and 20.4 % had obtained a bachelor's degree or more (ARC, 2010). Haaga's (2004) review of college graduation rates in Appalachia concluded that while the percentage of college graduates in the region grew during the 1990's, this growth did not serve to close the gap between the educational attainment of Appalachia and the nation as a whole; in fact, the gap widened. In addition, Haaga noted that the Appalachian counties exhibiting growth in graduation rates were already categorized as *attainment* counties by the U.S. Census, meaning they were already above the national average. Those counties experiencing the slowest growth had been previously categorized as *distressed*.

With regards to poverty, most research appears to indicate that economic growth in Appalachia has been slow, but significant. Lichter and Campbell's (2005) review of poverty in Appalachia indicated that the 1990's were a "watershed period" for the region; after decades of a nationally declared "War on Poverty," rates of poverty for disadvantaged populations appeared to correspond to national rates. However, by 2010 poverty rates in Appalachian counties continued to exceed national averages by 1.5% and a reported two-thirds of all Appalachian counties had unemployment rates higher than the national average (ARC, 2011b). Lichter and Campbell (2005) pointed out that changes in family composition may be correlated with poverty trends as well, because single mothers in Appalachia experience very high rates of poverty. In addition, the ARC reported that the nation's recent recession resulted in the loss of all jobs

gained in the Appalachian region since the year 2000 (ARC, 2011b). The same report stated that per capita market income in Appalachia was 75% of the average income reported nationally in 2008; in central Appalachia, which has more *distressed* counties, this number plummeted to 51%.

Changes in personal income may reflect the changes in employment in the region. Although no longer as dependent upon what are traditionally thought of as Appalachian careers (i.e., mining, forestry, heavy industries), it is worth noting that between 2000 and 2008, the greatest job growth in the region was in Mining (39.7%) (ARC, 2011b). Other areas of job growth reflected the region's diversification: employment in the Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate sector grew by 31.1%, the Professional and Technical Services sector grew by 24.7%, and the Health and Social Services sector grew by 23.5%. It is also important to note that aside from mining, these burgeoning career paths often require a degree beyond a high school diploma. Industry sectors that experienced a decline in employment included Manufacturing (-24.6%), Farming (-15.0%), Utilities (-13.4%), and Federal Government (-5.0%). When compared to other industries, the following held the highest shares of regional employment: Food, Lodging, and Entertainment (14.5%); Retail Trade (11.6%); State and Local Government (11.5%); Professional and Technical Services (11.1%); Health and Social Services (10.7%); and Manufacturing (10.9%). In spite of its recent growth and relatively high concentration, Mining ultimately claims only a 1.0% share of total employment.

Military enlistment has historically been a common career choice for young people in the Appalachian region. West Virginia provides an intriguing example of the impact of military enlistment on the region. As reported by Webb (2004):

the heavily Scots-Irish people of West Virginia ranked first, second, or third in military casualty rates in every U. S. war of the twentieth century. As one comparison, West Virginia's casualty rate was twice that of New York's and Connecticut's in Vietnam, and more than two and a half times the rate experienced by those two states in Korea. (p. 11)

Recent enlistment statistics, though harder to quantify, clearly indicate a high representation of Appalachian populations in the armed forces. The Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (2006) reported that in the years between 1996 and 2005, the South is "the only region to be slightly overrepresented among enlisted accessions compared to its proportion of 18-24 year-olds," (p. 9). As stated previously, much of the Appalachian region is part of the South, including the South Atlantic division, which was cited with the West South Central division as having the greatest representation of recruits (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, 2006). While enlistment may or may not lead to a lifelong military career, it is important to recognize its influence on the post-high school career paths of Appalachian youth, and its subsequent influence on the economy as a whole.

The history, identity, and culture of the Appalachian people are inextricably linked to economic issues (Shannon, 2006). As the region continues to struggle with the consequences of generational poverty, the Appalachian cultural identity is in a state of flux. Ellers (2008) joined his voice to those of several scholars in lamenting what he perceived as the weakening of traditional Appalachian identity due to continued economic strife:

Persistent disparities in income, education, and health status limited the life possibilities of young and old alike and hastened the disintegration of the once strong Appalachian family and culture. As the region entered a new century, communities throughout

Appalachia again confronted the dilemmas of modernization: how to define progress, . . . and how to change without losing the strengths of identity and tradition. (p. 243)

As will be discussed, the future of Appalachian culture may therefore be determined by issues of employment.

West Virginia: Education, employment, and income. Although it would be inaccurate to assume cultural homogeneity within the Appalachian region, West Virginia in many ways exemplifies its educational and socio-economic hardships. As the only state completely encompassed by the Appalachian Mountain Range (according to ARC definitions), West Virginia is both unified and isolated by regional affiliation. Price and Wial (2005) noted that *underemployment* appears to be a greater problem than *unemployment* in Appalachia, which is also reflected in national trends. By 2004, the highest underemployment rates in Appalachia were found in West Virginia. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2011b), the total percentage of the population with a four-year college degree or higher was only 17.1%. Those with a high school diploma or higher accounted for 81.6% of the population. Given that the nation's current unemployment rate for high school graduates under the age of 25 is 22.5% (as compared to 9.3% for college graduates the same age), the youth of West Virginia are at an especially critical point as they consider a transition from school to work (Shierholz & Edwards, 2011). The Census Bureau's 2005-2009 American Community Survey (2011a) ranked West Virginia 48th out of 50 states for median household income between 2007 and 2009². Of all West Virginia families surveyed, 13.2% qualified as living below the poverty level according to their previous 12 months' income. The rate was even higher when examining individuals rather than families:

² Arkansas was ranked 49th and Mississippi (parts of which are in the Appalachian region) was ranked 50th (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011a).

17.6% of all West Virginians surveyed earned an income that qualified as being below the poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011b).

Appalachian Culture and Values: Historical and Social Contexts

Individuals from Appalachia have been called an invisible minority due to superficial similarities with those in the dominant American culture (Mei & Russ, 2007; Russ, 2010; Salyers & Ritchie, 2006). Due to these similarities, some may assume that the term “Appalachian” refers solely to a geographical area, rather than a regional culture. In defense of the region’s cultural distinctiveness, Salyers and Ritchie (2006) applied Gollnick and Chinn’s (1998) definition of subculture in their examination of Appalachian cultural competencies: “Subculture is defined as an ethnic, regional, economic, or social group that exists within the context of a larger society and that shares the political and social institutions, as well as some traits and values, of the dominant culture,” (p. 130). Many Appalachian scholars have identified a system of beliefs and values that they argue is culturally distinct enough from mainstream America to be defined on its own, while still interacting with the broader national context (Keefe, 2005; McKinney, 2002; Russ, 2010). Rieder Bennett (2008) identified the culture of Appalachia as an “individualistic subcollectivistic culture, one that espouses collective ideals within an individualistic worldview or society,” (p. 254); however, she joined her voice to other Appalachian scholars in noting that not every person from the region may espouse the same values or worldview (see Tang & Russ, 2007). Because the majority of Appalachian cultural research has been done in the fields of sociology, anthropology, and education (Ali & Saunders, 2009; Rieder Bennett, 2008), psychology can provide new insights into relationships among Appalachian people, place, and culture (Shapiro, 1983).

Ethnic roots. Modern Appalachian culture has grown out of diverse ethnic roots. As previously discussed, a majority of the population self-identifies as being of European ancestry; however, diverse cultural enclaves established themselves throughout the region and have had significant impact on modern cultural structures. The first significant groups of Europeans to immigrate to the area were from German-speaking areas. Between 1700 and 1775, an estimated 84,500 German-speaking immigrants came to the American colonies (Williams, 2002). Many of these immigrants settled in Pennsylvania and would later be called the Pennsylvania Dutch (an apparent mispronunciation of the German word for “German”—*deutsch*). Two religious minorities in this population had a significant impact on the cultural and religious history of the region: the Ephrata and the Moravians. Areas became populated as believers followed their religious leaders to different parts of the Appalachian Mountains, and regional communication styles were influenced by the Moravian tendency to “not always say what was on their mind,” (Williams, 2002, p. 41) due to a history of religious persecution and bigotry.

As the influx of Germans began to restrict the availability of land in parts of Appalachia, the Irish also began to arrive in America. Northern and southern Irish immigrants combined to exceed the German population by 1775 (Irish – 109,000; German – 84,500) (Williams, 2002). The term “Scotch-Irish” came into use by Irish Protestants during the 19th century in an attempt to separate themselves from the Irish Catholics (Montgomery, 2004; Williams, 2002), and is a term still used by people in Appalachia to indicate one’s ancestry³.

While there is no doubt that the white Appalachian residents today have European ancestors, the storied Scotch-Irish heritage of the early Appalachian settlers has also been called

³ Questions remain regarding the use of the term “Scotch-Irish” versus “Scots-Irish.” While both are used, some have argued that given its historical prominence for more than three centuries, “Scotch-Irish” is more appropriate. Montgomery (2004) also noted that the descendants of Ulster immigrants in America call themselves “Scotch-Irish” and argued for, “the privilege, granted routinely to groups in modern society, to name themselves,” (p. 4). It should be noted, however, that this term has complex origins, and the discussion provided here is highly simplified.

into question. Blee and Billings (2000), for example, stated that, “the ethnic composition of Appalachia’s early population remains in doubt, consisting of some unknown composition of English, German, French, Dutch, Welsh, and Scotch-Irish settlers,” (p. 128). They argued that some authors have created a mythology about the warrior-like Scotch-Irish heritage in order to perpetuate the stereotype of Appalachians as feuding and violent.

While the Appalachian culture is sometimes stereotyped or even stigmatized by those outside of the region, the people it represents take pride in differences that separate them from those of different cultural backgrounds. Several scholars, however, have noted a possible loss of identity among the Appalachian people as the region became stereotyped by images of poverty and a lack of education (Best, 1979; Couto, 2002; Pollard, 2003). Consequently, rather than focusing on how others identify those from this region, it is important to first explore how these people describe themselves.

Keefe and Greene (2005) listed several cultural values shared by “modal Appalachian” clients (e.g., White, working-class/middle-class, rural dwellers) seen by mental health professionals:

Core Appalachian cultural values include egalitarianism, personalism, familism, a religious world view, a sense of place, and an avoidance of conflict. . . . In addition to these common values, Appalachian people tend to have a separate cultural identity, although there is no single label residents agree upon for people from the region . . . (p. 300)

Keefe and Greene (2005) argued that *egalitarianism*, a mainstream American value, is heightened among people in the region. In regards to *personalism*, the authors stated that face-to-face relations among people are incredibly important and relate to issues of trust among

individuals within a community. *Familism*, as defined by Keefe and Greene (2005), is the assumption that “[the family] is the basis for the construction of social relations in general,” (p. 301) and includes relatives far outside of the nuclear family. The religion of Appalachian peoples has been discussed at length by several scholars, and is often linked to discussions of social and class identities (Billings & Goldman, 1983; Sovine, 1983; Wagner, 2006; Welch, 1999). Keefe and Greene summarized the prevalence of a religious world view in the region:

Religion pervades the life of mountain people, regardless of whether or not they go to church (Dorgan 1987; McCauley 1995). Most mountaineers read the Bible, self-identify as Christians, and practice personal moral codes based on conservative interpretations of the Bible (disavowing, for example, alcohol, gambling, and profanity). Music preferences of rural Appalachians tend toward country and gospel music, in which religious themes and references are fundamental. . . . Prayer is one of the most important ways for individuals to cope with illness, trauma, and overwhelming crises (Keefe 2003). And churches which offer individuals direct access to super-natural power, such as the Pentecostal Church, which believes that members can receive the spiritual gift of the Holy Ghost and thus enjoy a state of holiness on Earth, have significant and growing appeal in a stratified society in which secular power is normally out of reach. (p. 301)

This religious world-view also relates to the “spiritual bond” many Appalachians describe having with the land. This bond includes feelings of responsibility and stewardship over the land, and a personal identification with natural things (i.e., seasons, animals, plants). The land can also become inseparable from family identity.

Finally, Keefe and Greene (2005) discussed an avoidance of conflict in general interactions. Far from the violent and sadistic stereotypes that often characterize Appalachian

“hillbillies,” many mountain people try to avoid conflict by speaking indirectly about subjects and avoiding advice-giving. Manners are viewed as extremely important, and children are taught that sharing and playing peacefully is to be expected. Each of these values lends itself to the general culture of the average Appalachian.

Russ (2010) joined Keefe and Greene (2005) in identifying important cultural considerations when treating Appalachian clients in a mental health setting. She noted nine areas of difference when comparing “typical Appalachians” (white, blue collar, rural) with the majority culture: “trust issues, dialect and communication styles, gender roles, educational goals, substance abuse issues, career, family support and enmeshment, the social hierarchy (community and kinship based) and loyalty to place,” (p. 2). A closer examination of Appalachian cultural values is necessary in order to understand the social and historical contexts within which mountain people create meaning.

Trust and exploitation. Russ (2010) joins a number of Appalachian scholars in crediting much of the widespread mistrust of outsiders to the historic isolation of the region. She cited Breckinridge’s (1972) reports on the lack of roads and reliable transportation that made travel to the “hollers” more difficult. However, as Lewis (2000) pointed out, the relative isolation of the region was comparable to the rest of rural America, and therefore should be questioned as a significant source of cultural distinction. As an example of a growing body of scholarship, Lewis (2000) cited Wilhelm’s (1977) assertion that, “the idea that the Appalachian Mountains acted as a physical barrier, either for the people living within the mountain region, or for those individuals trying to cross them, hardly stands up against the evidence at hand,” (pp. 22-23). Such evidence includes the healthy levels of socio-economic enterprise throughout the region from the early 19th century (Shapiro, 1978).

The same sources of socio-economic enterprise that decreased the region's isolation may have increased levels of mistrust by exploiting Appalachian resources. The rich natural resources of the land created opportunities for wealthy industrialists, most of whom were not located in the region, to make large amounts of money (Lewis, 2000). The absentee owners of coal mines, mills, and timberlands were seen as greedily harvesting resources without contributing in equal measure to the sustenance of the land and its people (Appalachian Land Ownership Task Force, 1983).

Today, states have been tasked with balancing the positive and negative impacts of mining (Walls & Billings, 2002). Regarding negative impacts, mining has had environmental impacts on water, soil, and air, and evidence shows it has also contributed to health issues and mortality rates of some of its workers. The deaths of 29 coal miners in the Upper Big Branch mine of West Virginia on April 5, 2010 provided a dramatic example of the continuing conflict between mine owners and the miners themselves. In their report on the incident, the United Mine Workers union (UMWA; 2011) stated, "There were many factors that led to this disaster but there was only one source for all of them: A rogue corporation." The report later concluded that the explosion "constituted a massive slaughter in the nature of an industrial homicide," and laid the responsibility for the miners' deaths squarely at the feet of Massey Energy, the proprietor of the mine, and Don Blankenship, the CEO of the company. The report stated:

Once again, miners have died because they were put in harm's way by their employer and not sufficiently protected by those who are charged with doing so. Once again, the television cameras have come and gone in a rural hollow in Appalachia and reinforced the false notion that mining coal is an inevitably deadly occupation. (p. 5)

In essence, UMWA denounced corporate practices that prioritize energy extraction and profit over human life, and which lay the blame of any human casualties on the natural dangers of mining, rather than on industrial negligence. These indictments highlighted the conflicted feelings of miners and their representatives, who acknowledge their loyalty to their occupation while condemning the industry's treatment of its human resources.

The more recent utilization of hydraulic fracturing (aka “fracking”) to extract natural gas from the Marcellus Shale deposit has brought up these old tensions in a new context. On one side are those who see enormous economic opportunities both for the un(der)employed workers of the region and for the global economy (Secretary of Energy Advisory Board, 2011). On the other side are those who see inestimable environmental risks to the land and its residents (Lustgarten & Kusnetz, 2011). In spite of environmental and public health concerns, however, the Natural Gas Subcommittee of the Secretary of Energy Advisory Board (SEAB) is not advising a hiatus, or even a deceleration, of the enterprise; rather, they are attempting to find a way to balance the nation's desire for energy and the inevitable environmental impacts, “to ensure the protection of public health and the environment,” while still reaping the benefits of a natural source of energy (SEAB; p. 13). As exemplified by both the Upper Big Branch Mine explosion and the use of hydraulic fracturing, issues of exploitation continue to contribute to the Appalachian culture of mistrust.

Communication styles. Variations of the Appalachian dialect distinguish individuals from the region as part of a distinctive culture. As Mei and Russ (2007) pointed out, the people of Appalachia are an “invisible minority” due to their resemblance to White America, and the psychological concept of regional affiliation is therefore often tied to dialect. Generally, people identify others by the way they talk and associate specific attributes with distinct dialects (Alford

& Strother, 1990). Empirical evidence indicates that Appalachian dialects are often associated with negative stereotypes, such as being unintelligent, dependent, unprofessional, and unorganized (Andreescu & Shutt, 2009; Atkins, 1993; Billings, Norman, & Ledford, 1999; Luhman, 1990; Parsons, 2009; Puckett, 2005; Wilson, 2000). Stereotypes against the Appalachian dialect and communication have been called, arguably, “the most persistent stereotypes regarding Appalachians,” (Rieder Bennett, 2008, p. 252). Some studies have shown that some individuals from Appalachia may rate their accent and dialect as less desirable when compared to others (Parsons, 2009; Scalise, 2000) and may attempt to hide their dialects in order to avoid discrimination (Atkins, 1993). In spite of this, Jones’s (2002) study of people who had immigrated outside of Appalachia found that “despite prejudicial treatment by the dominant status group, members of low-status groups such as urban Appalachians often consciously use stigmatized, non-standard dialects in an attempt to foster group distinctiveness and to preserve their cultural identity,” (p. 150).

Just as language may bring out the prejudice of those outside of the subculture, it also serves as an important marker of a member of an in-group and, consequently, may be essential to one’s identity (Jones, 2002). As Gergen (2001) stated, “if the individual mind acquires knowledge of the world and if language is the means of conveying the content of mind to others, then language becomes the bearer of truth,” (p. 804). Consequently, understanding the meanings inherent in Appalachian communication styles is imperative to any study of its people.

Puckett (2005) described several important distinctions in Appalachian social interactions, including greetings and public encounters, and requests and orders. Puckett noted that greetings in rural communities are extremely important, and indicate relationships among people. For example, speakers who are kin may greet each other differently than they would a

member of an esteemed class, such as a preacher or doctor. When greeting outsiders or strangers, “it is inappropriate to exchange more than the most formal or briefest of greetings,” (p. 37). Cross-gender encounters may also be more complex, and should be kept to brief exchanges of greetings unless the actors are kin or are interacting for a specific purpose.

Another important aspect of public encounters, according to Puckett (2005), is establishing “place.” By stating where one is from, a person establishes more than his or her geographical origin; more importantly, one establishes his or her place in the community and social hierarchy (Kingsolver, 1992). As elaborated by Puckett (2005), “place” can establish a person’s social and political standing:

Creating place relations is similar to building one’s “name” in a community, but it is more group focused than the prestige value assigned to having a good name. If a person is a nonlocal, then he or she has neither a “place” nor a “name.” Both must be created to “belong”; elaborated greeting practices assist in getting these processes started. (p. 37)

She goes on to provide an example of establishing place in a situation that is both cross-generational and cross-gender:

Older speaker: Whose girl/boy are you?

Younger speaker: I be/am [parent’s full name; parent of same sex as speaker]’s boy/girl.

Older speaker then asks for clarification, such as: Your daddy’s from up Laurel Creek?

[Or some other query that assists in “placing” the younger speaker.] (p. 38)

Establishing place requires a foothold within a social hierarchy, and therefore a non-local may never truly be considered a part of the community. However, by observing unspoken rules of communication, even a non-local may establish feelings of respect. The establishment of place has been described as a pillar of Appalachian culture (Russ, 2010).

Puckett (2005) also noted the saturated meanings behind the communication of requests or orders. She stated, “One of the most widely known tropes, or sayings, attributed to mountain residents is that of ‘Ain’t nobody tellin me what to do,’” (p. 38). This saying highlights the importance of autonomy and independence within the culture. Puckett described southern Appalachians as having a fairly concrete understanding of their “rights,” or “biblically sanctioned justifications for engaging in purposeful actions or activities,” (p. 39). Thus, it may be difficult for medical practitioners to make recommendations about the care of one’s body, or for a teacher to advise parents regarding the education of their child, because this may be violating the person’s rights. Puckett therefore advises medical, mental health, and social service providers to “never” use imperatives, so as not to upset the social order or offend the independence of another.

Collectivism. In addition, Appalachian styles of communication establish many of the collectivist values that separate Appalachian people from the dominant culture. Russ (2010) identified a tendency among Appalachians to avoid confrontation by expressing complaints and dissatisfaction indirectly. She also noted this tendency in asking any specific questions about a person or his or her activities. Russ (2010) clarified with an example:

instead of saying, ‘What did you do this past weekend?’ an Appalachian might phrase it as, ‘Hope you had a good time this past weekend.’ This gives the person addressed the choice of answering either ‘I did, thanks’ or telling what they did in more detail. (p. 4)

She attributed this communication style to the intricate social mores of a collectivist culture. Salyers and Ritchie (2006) also linked modest communication styles with the collectivist cultural value of avoiding the appearance of, “thinking too highly of themselves or their abilities,” (p. 135). For example, someone from Appalachia would tend to downplay his or her talents and

defer to others so as not to seem “above their raisin” (Russ, 2010, p. 3). As such, people from Appalachia prefer a laid back, non-direct style of communication, and they also highly value a sense of humor (Jones, 1994). Jones listed “sense of humor” as one of the ten values that define Appalachian culture, and noted that humorous communications are seen as helping people help each other through hard times. Such communications hint at the collectivist social identity that contextualizes Appalachian individual identity.

The Appalachian emphasis on social structure and community differs from mainstream America’s focus on individualism and personal goal attainment (Fisher, 1993; Russ, 2010; Wagner, 2005; Walls & Billings, 2002; Welch, 1999). Emphasis on social structure probably emerged from the close kinship ties among early settlers in rural areas (Lewis, 2000; Russ, 2006; Walls & Billings, 2002; Welch, 1999). These ties have expanded to include fictive kin (e.g., near neighbors, church members) (Russ, 2010). In addition, children are rarely alone and a number of adults (kin and fictive kin) may participate in caretaking (Abbott-Jamieson, 2005; Russ, 2010). Community therefore becomes family (and vice versa) and decisions are made in light of what would most benefit the society, rather than the individual (Bochner, 1994; Obermiller & Maloney, 2002; Triandis, 1989).

Prioritizing the greater social welfare of the community or family group leads to a pooling of resources (Russ, 2010). Salyers and Ritchie (2006) connected such sharing to what Payne (2002, 2003) described in her work on generational poverty. Payne highlighted loyalty to family as a “driving force” in decision-making, leading to adherence to rules regarding family structure, relationships, possessions, and love. Salyers and Ritchie (2006) described the consequences of such decisions, even when they involve migrations outside of regional boundaries:

This sharing of resources . . . is a part of the Appalachian value system that pertains to family loyalty and pride. Working and living together as a family unit that also includes extended family is a means for all to be successful in migratory moves. This may seem contradictory to the need to be self-reliant and independent. However, it is through working together and supporting each other as a family unit that independence and self-reliance can be maintained. (p. 139)

The authors related this to previous research, supporting the hypothesis that, among the poor, being included as part of a social structure is important to survival. Due to the importance of the social structure as a means of survival and identity maintenance, communications that may challenge the social structure by vaunting the self are actively avoided.

Gender roles. Traditional Appalachian social and family structures are patriarchal, but the role of the mother is extremely important. In discussing the history of Appalachia, Straw (2006) stated, “While it was clearly a patriarchal society, women maintained strong and influential positions within the most important social unit in the mountain society,” (p. 6). It appears that much of this social structure remains the same today. Generally, men have been expected to provide for the physical needs of their families, while women have been viewed primarily as nurturers, subservient to the dominant male family member (Rezek, 2010; Russ, 2010; Welch, 1999; Williams, 2002). Research has also shown that, as in other American rural societies, traditional gender roles are valued and supported (Welch, 1999). However, expectations of men and women often depend upon situational forces, and women may be called upon to lead families (Maggard, 1994; Rezek, 2010). In her study of culturally sensitive preventive health care among Southern Appalachian women, Stephens (2005) found two dominant cultural themes: 1) the family is of principle importance among Appalachians, and 2)

the mother is the core of the family unit. Thus, while traditional Christian patriarchy is the rule, the role of the mother is central to society's functioning (Welch, 1999). Rezek's (2010) findings supported Stephens (2005) by identifying "aspects of social structure that are patriarchal and matriarchal, and they intersect and overlap," (p. 137). Clearly, while it is easy to assume that a patriarchal super-structure encourages rigid subjugation of women, the reality is that traditional gender roles may be relatively fluid, with complex expectations and responsibilities.

In spite of this fluidity, gender-specific careers tend to be the rule in Appalachia. Appalachian men express a preference for work that they view as more "masculine," which tends to translate into blue collar jobs (Russ, 2006; Seufert & Carrozza, 2004; Shaw, DeYoung, & Rademacher, 2004; Thorne et al., 2004). Russ (2010) reported that Appalachian men prefer blue collar jobs over white collar positions at almost double the rate of mainstream American males. There are several preceding factors that may have reinforced the current gender segregation of careers. In addition to the often limited and gender-specific opportunities historically available in the region, President Johnson's *War on Poverty* created vocational programs that segregated men and women and taught "appropriate" skills (Russ, 2006). Though Appalachian female industrial workers have been documented since the 1800s, women did not gain a foothold in the mining industry until winning a class action suit over sex discrimination in the coal industry in the 1970s (Maggard, 1994; Tallichet, 2011). While more women may now be seen working heavy machinery or driving trucks, training for more industrial positions has only been widely available since the mid 1990s. Women in these positions remain anomalies in the Appalachian region and they are represented in smaller numbers than the rest of the country (Engelhardt, 2004; Russ, 2006).

Poverty is highly correlated with gender and this relationship is starkly visible in Appalachia (Thorne et al., 2004; Tyer-Viola & Cesario, 2010). While late 20th century Appalachian women were gaining more representation in traditionally male-dominated careers, opportunities for such work were generally on the decline (Tallichet, 2011). This has led to “an unprecedented restructuring as female dominated service employment expanded,” (Tallichet, 2011, p. 145). However, the increasing numbers of women who compete for a diminishing number of jobs earn about two-thirds of the wages of their male counterparts, with wage inequity the highest in affluent areas (Thorne et al., 2004). Tickamyer and Tickamyer (1988) reported that Appalachian women are particularly vulnerable to financial distress in female-headed households, especially those with young children. According to the Appalachian Regional Commission, the 2000 Census found that single female-headed Appalachian families experienced higher poverty rates than the national average even when the head of the family worked full time (9.6% families in poverty in Appalachia versus 7.5% in the non-Appalachian United States) (Lichter & Campbell, 2005). However, 64 to 70 percent of all female-headed households (with children under the age of six) in distressed Appalachian counties live in poverty (Thorne et al., 2004). Non-white single working women experience poverty at double the rates of whites and Asians, and those who are not in the labor force experience rates of poverty between 57 and 69 percent (Lichter & Campbell, 2005). As the trend in single-parent households continues to rise throughout the country, it is important to consider how gender norms may influence the educational and vocational opportunities of Appalachian children.

Educational goals. Contrary to popular belief, education is generally well regarded in Appalachia (Russ, 2010). Historically, educational goals were closely tied to Christian religious beliefs and the spiritual mandate to read God’s word (Blustein, 2006; Shaw et al., 2004).

However, the relationship between Appalachian people and compulsory education has a much more complex history. The Appalachian culture of community and distrust of outsiders resulted in resistance to mandates from government and social service agencies (Woodrum, 2004). Schools were often established and run by the professional class, who had ties to the absentee Eastern industrialists and landlords, and therefore represented entities that were viewed skeptically by those in the lower classes (Shaw et al., 2004; Woodrum, 2004). Due partly to the remoteness of some communities, as well as the primacy of family and church in the community (as opposed to government run schools), formal instruction was therefore somewhat difficult to establish (Shaw et al., 2004; Welch, 1999; Woodrum, 2004). Until World War II, educational attainment past the eighth grade was an anomaly, and the content and quality of instruction was repeatedly challenged (Shaw et al., 2004). Consequently, while education has always been valued, it has also been traditionally viewed as a means to support family or community goals.

The cultural values of family and community serve both to support and discourage educational attainment. Russ (2010) explained:

If the family needs a young person's earnings, education may be prematurely discontinued in deference to family requirements. If a particular trade or career could only be carried on outside of the Appalachian community, the family may discourage its implementation. (p. 3)

In Woodrum's (2004) qualitative study of parents and teachers in Appalachian Ohio, she noted among parents, "the often-voiced Appalachian critique of schools that they 'only educate kids to leave [their families],'" (p. 5). When questioned on the subject, one teacher responded, "Isn't teaching them to get out of this area what we're here for, really?" (p. 5), and many other teachers reported beliefs that by staying in the area, their students were "fated to lives of poverty," (p. 5).

Educators and parents may therefore lack trust in each other, which may cultivate feelings of suspicion of educational systems as a whole. This suspicion may, in turn, influence familial attitudes about education.

The literature has generally supported the role of parents in children's educational and vocational attitudes, even among low-income youth (Griffith, 1996; Peterson, Stivers, & Peters, 1986; Simons-Morton & Crump, 2003). Kenny, Blustein, Chaves, Grossman, and Gallagher (2003) investigated the role of perceived barriers and relational support in the educational and vocational lives of urban high school students, and found strong relationships among kinship support and school engagement and work role salience. Wettersten et al. (2005) investigated whether or not these findings held true for students in rural schools, and found that, "adolescents' perceptions of their parents' pro-educational behaviors demonstrated a sustained relationship with each of the dependent variables in the study," (p. 661). While much of Appalachia qualifies as "rural," its unique culture requires further investigation into how familial attitudes influence educational goals.

Several studies have been conducted to examine familial influences on college expectations of Appalachian youth. Peterson, Stivers, and Peters (1986) attempted to identify the significant others (family or non-family) that influenced career and educational decisions. They examined longitudinal (1969 - 1979) and cross-sectional data from 302 white Appalachian and 117 rural Black youths. Results indicated that among white male and female Appalachians, mothers and fathers were the most influential significant others in developing occupational plans, with an increase in the diversity of significant others during later adolescence. Similar results were indicated for the Black students, who chose mothers and fathers as the most influential significant others in every developmental period except late adolescence, when older siblings,

other relatives, teachers, and peers were selected more frequently. Using chi square tests to compare the races, the authors found that none of the comparisons maintained consistent race differences across developmental periods. The authors also reported that, surprisingly, both white and Black participants did not identify extended family members as influential in their career decisions.

Chenoweth and Galliher (2004) investigated the factors influencing the college aspirations of rural West Virginia high school students. Participants included 242 high school seniors in rural counties of West Virginia (populations less than 12,000). Results indicated that 69% of all participants planned to attend college within one or two years post-graduation. There were no significant differences in college aspirations between male and female participants. However, the authors reported some unexpected differences between the sexes when exploring the influence of family factors. Among male participants, chi-square analyses indicated a strong relationship between mothers' college attendance and plans to attend college and an even stronger relationship between college plans and fathers' college attendance. These relationships were not significant among females; however, when both parents attended college, it appeared to influence both male and female participants. The authors also found a strong relationship between fathers' occupations and the pursuit of a college degree:

A greater proportion of students planning to go to college reported that their fathers were employed in professional occupations, while the majority of those not planning to go to college reported that their fathers were unemployed, unskilled, or semiskilled. (p. 7)

They also found that higher levels of family SES were related to males attending college. This relationship was not seen among female participants.

Chenowith and Galliher (2004) also investigated the influence of three elements of Appalachian culture on college aspirations: *localism*, *historicism*, and *familism*. They defined *localism* as “a sense of belonging, or being part of the land,” (p. 4). *Historicism* was defined as “the sense or understanding of one’s place in history, within the family and region where one developed,” (p. 4). In turn, *familism* was conceptualized as “a strong commitment and reliance upon family of origin,” (p. 4). Results indicated that, of the three factors, only familism presented significant or interpretable results: extended family members’ college attendance was highly associated with students’ college aspirations. While these results contradicted the findings of Peterson et al. (1986), they supported some earlier findings. In conclusion, the authors recognized the importance of family and cultural factors in educational aspirations, but noted many unanswered questions regarding the functions of these familial influences.

Ali and Saunders (2006) explored the factors influencing college expectations among 87 10th and 11th grade high school students (male and female) in central Appalachia using the lens of social cognitive career theory. Among the sample, 55.3% of students reported that their fathers obtained a high school degree but had no post-secondary education, 18.3% indicated that their fathers had not graduated from high school, 43% of their mothers reportedly graduated from high school, and 23.3% of the mothers did not graduate from high school. Ali and Saunders reported their results as follows:

As expected, examination of the correlation matrix revealed a number of significant relationships between the . . . variables, such as relationships between (a) father’s education and vocational/educational self-efficacy, (b) father’s education and parental support, and (c) parental support and vocational/educational self-efficacy. There was a

significant correlation between father's education and college expectations but no significant correlation between mother's education and college expectations. (p. 44)

The authors went on to explain that 36.5% of the variance in college expectations was accounted for by vocational/educational self-efficacy and parental support: high levels of perceived parental support (and high levels of self-efficacy) indicated stronger expectations to attend college after high school.

In conclusion, it appears that the same aspects of Appalachian culture that may negatively influence educational aspirations may also provide support for higher educational goals (Woodrum, 2004). There are strong indicators that most Appalachians recognize education as key to the survival of their communities, even though they have mixed feelings about where higher education may lead (Shaw et al., 2004). As shown in several studies, one of the most important influences on educational goals is family relationships, particularly parental education and occupation.

Substance abuse and unemployment. While Appalachians traditionally hold the family as the most important unit of society, the influence of substance abuse has caused significant changes in the structure of Appalachian communities. While rates of rural drug use are at lower levels than suburban or metropolitan areas, some parts of Appalachia are showing disturbing trends (Clevenger, 2010). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC; 2010), states in the Appalachian region tie with the Southwest for the highest rates of drug overdose deaths in the nation. Per capita, West Virginia tied with New Mexico for the state with the highest drug overdose rate (19.1 deaths per 100,000). The most common drug categories associated with these deaths are cocaine, heroin, and prescription opioid painkillers such as Lortab, Vicodin, Lorcet, and Oxycontin (CDC, 2010). In the same report, the CDC noted that

male rates for drug overdose deaths exceed female rates in every age group, nationwide. High levels of unemployment among men in the Appalachian region may contribute to these high levels of substance abuse (Brown, 2002; Miller, 2004; Russ, 2010).

Among coal miners, drug and alcohol abuse has become a recognized problem, and the West Virginia senate included mandatory drug testing as part of the latest mine safety bill (Brunner, 2012). According to the Mine Safety and Health Administration (2004), “Substance abuse in our mines is a serious problem and if left unchecked we will invariably see an increase in mine accidents and fatalities, a decline in our skilled mining workforce and a decrease in our productivity,” (p. 5). In an article for *The State Journal*, Dailey (2012) highlighted several incidents of mining accidents that had been related to drug use, and reported statistics from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration:

It’s the rare coal company that has not encountered illicit drug use among its employees. . . statistics for the mining profession are higher than other professions . . . more than 12% of miners reported illicit drug use and 15.7% reported heavy alcohol use. Ten percent of miners said that they were dependent on drugs or alcohol. More than one mining accident has been suspected of being related to drug or alcohol use, even if it was not determined to be the cause of the accident.

These high rates of drug and alcohol use bring up questions regarding personal or contextual factors that may lead coal miners to engage in these dangerous and destructive behaviors, including the possibility, for example, that opioid painkillers may be prescribed for mining-related injuries. These questions have yet to be addressed, and people continue to disagree on the best methods of intervention (Brunner, 2012).

One reason for these disagreements may be the ambivalence many Appalachians feel about substance use. Keefe (2005) noted that mountain people may view substance abuse issues from a religious standpoint, believing that addiction should be cured by faith and belief. While alcoholism and drug abuse are recognized as physiological illnesses, they are often viewed as sins by the community at large. In studying beliefs about alcohol among 61 Appalachian working class women, Howell and Fiene (2005) found that 80.3% of respondents agreed with the statement, “alcoholism is a disease,” (p. 253). However, 62.3% stated that they “agree” with the statement “My religion teaches that drinking is a sin,” (p. 253). This conflict may lead to feelings of shame and hopelessness on the part of the users, contributing to less participation in treatment (13.0% of respondents in Howell and Fiene’s study stated that they try to “hide” their drinking from their families). This may also contribute to the high rates of depression of the area (Keefe, Hastrup, & Thomas, 2005). Substance abuse and unemployment are thus having a significant effect on Appalachian culture, changing the way Appalachians think about work, independence, and their spiritual worth (Russ, 2010).

Appalachian career choices. In Shannon’s (2006) overview of work and the Appalachian economy, he stated, “Much of the history, cultural development, and folklore, as well as the social problems, of Appalachia can be traced directly or indirectly to its economy,” (Shannon, 2006, p. 67). This connection among work, economy, history, and culture supports Blustein’s (2006) culturally embedded definition of work:

Working also has a unique meaning that is derived from and embedded within specific cultural contexts, which shape and are shaped by individual experiences of working . . . that contribute to the overall social and economic welfare of a given culture. (p. 3)

The fact that much of the traditional Appalachian economy was driven by careers in the region's natural resources adds an important, and complex, dimension to the "spiritual bond" (Keefe & Greene, 2005) that many people feel to the land.

Mining. By 1870, the agrarian economy of mid-nineteenth century Appalachia was overtaken by coal mining, which continues to impact the physical, economical, and emotional landscape of the region today (Lewis, 2000; Shannon, 2006). As reported by Harvey (1986), the central Appalachian coal basins have supplied more than half of the bituminous coal⁴ in the country, and currently more than half of the nation's electricity is provided by coal (West Virginia Office of Miners' Health, Safety, and Training, 2012). West Virginia is the country's primary producer in underground coal, holding four percent of all coal reserves (West Virginia Office of Miners' Health, Safety, and Training, 2012), though coal production in the western United States currently outstrips Appalachian coal production by about 250 million tons (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2013). This coal supplies fuel for factories, steel mills, and power plants around the world (Cavalier, 2012b; Harvey, 1986).

Recent figures published by the U.S. Energy Information Administration (2013) point out that coal production nationwide decreased 7.2 percent between 2011 and 2012. The average number of employees in U.S. coal mines has decreased 1.9 percent: from a high of 91,611 miners in 2011 to 89,838 employees in 2012. In Appalachia specifically, the total number of underground miners in 2011 stood at 40,520 but has dropped to 39,850 in 2012. Coal employment as a whole was down by 4.4% in the region.

While mining no longer dominates Appalachian employment, its influence continues to guide political, social, and fiscal policy in the region (Eller, 2008). For example, as reported by

⁴ Bituminous coal is primarily used for production of electricity. Anthracite coal is primarily used in the production of steel.

West Virginia Public Broadcasting, mining and related exports are the “driving factors” in the state’s revenue situation (Cavalier, 2012b). In West Virginia Governor Earl Ray Tomblin’s 2012 *State of the State* address, he noted that coal severance taxes in 2011 equaled \$400 million, or a tenth of the state’s budget (Cavalier, 2012a; Cavalier, 2012b). According to the West Virginia Office of Miners’ Health, Safety, and Training (2012), taxes paid by the coal industry and by utility companies that make electricity using coal from the state accounted for more than 60% of business taxes paid. Looking forward, however, exports of coal are expected to decline, while exports of natural gas are expected to rise (Cavalier, 2012b). Thus, the past, present and future of much of the Appalachian economy continues to be tied to mining.

Today’s jobs in coal mining provide a steady, sizeable income as well as health benefits for workers and their families. According to Caldwell (2011), salaries are relatively similar between union and non-union workers, and for an underground laborer the average salary is \$23.51 per hour (minimum \$22.77/hour, maximum \$27.00/hour). Miners in skilled or semi-skilled jobs may make higher average hourly wages (e.g., \$28.21 - Electrician, \$26.94 - Mechanic, \$25.27 - Drill Operator). Workers in management positions make even more substantial salaries. For example, the average salary of a General Foreman is \$173,000 per year. Mine Managers average \$129,000 per year, Mine Foremen average \$86,000 per year, and Shift Bosses average \$80,000 per year (Caldwell, 2011). In addition to a stable income, careers in mining also provide opportunities to explore different types of work options and to develop valuable skills. In a recent pilot study by this author, the participants (retired underground coal miners) stated that they took advantage of opportunities to learn new skills, work with different crew members, and gain responsibility and leadership positions (S. I. Chamberlain, personal communication, June 5 & 7, 2012).

Coal mining plays an extremely complex role in Appalachian communities that cannot be easily qualified. The link between Appalachia and mining goes far beyond the economy, becoming inseparable from the cultural ecology of the region. Mining is the source of jobs, security, and identity on the one hand, and on the other hand, it contributes to environmental changes, illness, and inequality. In 2010, an online message board asked readers in Harlan, Kentucky to respond to the question “Why coal miner [sic] are a proud sort.” Responses reflected the pride miners take in their professional identity, in part because of the inherent dangers miners face. One commenter stated:

Some people especially those not native to, or familiar with the coal fields and the coal miners themselves. Wonder why coal miners are so proud of what they do! Some are even of the opinion that coal miners do nothing any more special than any other American worker! But I can tell you from first hand experience that coal miners are cut from a different cloth than most men are! I personally have witnessed things underground that would send many hardened men screaming for their lives. Just going underground itself is dangerous. And miners face these dangers every day. Even more than military men and law enforcement officials. There are a thousand and one ways to get killed in an underground coal mine. And miners have learned to except the possibility of never returning home to they're loved ones. Its a possibility they have come to terms with and have learned to live with day in and day out. Yes the work now days is far easier than mining of yesteryear! But the dangers have been multiplied partly due to being constantly exposed high tech fast moving equipment in confined places. But the main reason coal mining is even more dangerous for us than it was for our predecessors is because our grandfathers all ready mined the easy good stuff, and we are now in seams of coal that

was too dangerous for them to mine. So you may hate coal you may hate the whole process, and you may even hate the miners themselves But surely ANYONE could see and recognize that what miners do is one of the most dangerous jobs on the planet! And that in itself should at the very least earn the respect of all! (rawtruth, 2010; all spelling and grammar from the original post)

Other comments articulated similar sentiments; for example, hunter (2010) stated, “I am a coal miner and so is most of my family. I am proud to say I am a hard working American who has respect and integrity [sic].” Coal miners and their families often identify strongly with their work as one of the defining aspects of their identity, and attribute other positive parts of personal and group identities (e.g. being hardworking, loyal, and brave) to their work as miners.

While miners have traditionally taken a great deal of pride in their profession, they have also expressed a keen awareness of its dangers and have actively campaigned against inequities between laborers and owners (Blizzard, 2010; Carawan & Carawan, 1975). The United Mine Workers Association (UMWA) was founded in 1890 and fought to establish the eight-hour work day (1898), collective bargaining rights (1933), health and retirement benefits (1946), and health and safety protections (1969 – today) (UMWA, 2012a). Disputes such as the West Virginia Coal Wars (1920-1921) and the Harlan Mine War (1931) elevated labor disputes to matters of life and death. In addition, the union continues to fight to protect and care for miners suffering from black lung, or pneumoconiosis, which results from exposure to coal dust. As reported by the U.S. Department of Labor, the Black Lung Disability Trust Fund (overseen by the Division of Coal Mine Workers’ Compensation), provided over \$726 million dollars in benefits for the diagnosis and treatment of miners and their dependents during fiscal year 2004 (United States Department of Labor, 2012). In West Virginia, the Department of Health and Human Resources

(2012) reported that an average of 4,000 individuals receive black lung program services each year, and UMWA (2012b) reported that an average of 1,500 former coal miners die of the disease each year. With regards to mining injuries and deaths on the job, the Mine Safety and Health Administration (2012) reported that while early coal mining fatalities averaged at least 1,000 per year in the early 20th century, the yearly average in coal mining deaths between 2001 and 2005 was around 30. While miners have successfully advocated for better working conditions, the relationships between miners and corporations—and their resulting impact on the broader culture—continues to spark intense controversy.

This relationship has grown only more complex as American extractive industries play a smaller role on the global stage. In communities historically tied to mining and timber, some have proposed that this has led to a type of identity crisis. Bell and York (2010) completed a compelling study of the connections between coal-mining and cultural identity in West Virginia against what they described as a backdrop of economic decline and environmental destruction. As described by Bell and York (2010), the legacy of rural communities is an identity tied to a waning industry. They argued:

This tendency for many in a community to identify with an industry that was *historically* important in the local economy, but that may not be any longer, is regularly exploited by extractive industries to maintain their political influence, which is often used to avoid government regulations aimed at ensuring the protection of the environment and public health. (p. 112)

In this way, some argue that the identity of coal miners is being more exploited than ever in an effort to preserve as much control as possible over the energy resources of the Appalachian region.

By exploring the propaganda efforts of coal companies from the early 20th century and onward, Bell and York (2010) argue for the influence of coal on numerous aspects of Appalachian culture that continue to endure, including traditional gender roles and the marginalization of Appalachians in the national consciousness. Bell and York argued that, in an effort to maintain their hold on the resources of Appalachia, the coal industries have developed a faux grassroots movement called the Friends of Coal. The goal of this movement, according to the authors, is to “counter the coal industry’s loss of citizens’ employment loyalties by constructing an ideology of dependency and identity through a massive public relations campaign,” (p. 128). In addition to over 50 interviews with both citizens and activists in Boone County, West Virginia, the researchers conducted content analyses of four different sources, including regional and national newspaper articles that mentioned Friends of Coal (2002-2007), articles referencing the Friends of Coal in *Coal Leader: Coal’s National Newspaper* (2003-2006), the Friends of Coal website, and the West Virginia Coal Association Website (the parent organization for the Friends of Coal). Their results questioned the validity of an ongoing emotional connection between West Virginia and mining, and indicated that much of the current cultural relationship between the state and the industry is the result of manipulation and strategy, particularly through the appropriation of cultural icons and the use of community traditions of solidarity and activism:

The statement “It is likely that no state and industry are as closely identified with one another as West Virginia and coal,” which appeared on the Friends of Coal Website in 2005, imparts exactly the message this organization hopes West Virginians will come to believe, despite the coal industry’s declining contribution to employment in the state. The coal industry works to create (or re-create) and maintain its standing as the “identity” of

West Virginia. Through our content analysis and field observations, we found that the Friends of Coal employs two strategies to do this: (1) by appropriating West Virginia cultural icons; and (2) by creating a visible presence in the social landscape of West Virginia through stickers, yard signs, and sponsorships. (p. 129)

Bell and York's (2010) work highlighted the incredible tensions that characterize the political, economical, and cultural landscape of the Appalachian region. On the one hand, people of the region have a heritage and identity that vaunts their connection to land and labor, and on the other hand they are conscious that their loyalties may be used against them to strip them of their lands. The oral and musical traditions of the Appalachian Mountains are replete with examples of this polarization. These traditions demonstrate the complicated linkages between identity and coal: even when the costs are incredibly high, the preservation of coal is critically connected to preservation of identity.

Strongly influenced by the oral traditions in the region, Appalachian art and culture has historically mirrored the lives of mountain people, including the struggles of the laborer. From its first introduction into the broader American culture, Appalachian music was described as being "real American music," and paternalistically vaunted as reflecting the lives of "a simple but decent people who lived in primal and direct relationship with the earth and nature," (Malone, 2002, p. 145). Coal-mining music or protest music was grafted onto the roots of traditional Appalachian song structures during the industrialization of the late 19th century (Olson & Kalra, 2006). These songs mirrored the struggles of the working classes and the social and environmental abuses that came with coal mining. Many of the older songs continue to be part of the American consciousness, such as Florence Reece's "Which Side Are You On?" Sarah Ogan Gunning's "Come All You Coal Miners," Hazel Dickens's "Black Lung" and Merle

Travis's "Sixteen Tons." Coal-related songs are written by modern artists as well, such as Gillian Welch's "Miner's Refrain" (1998), Dwight Yoakam's "Miner's Prayer" (1985) and Steve Earle's "Hillbilly Highway" (1986). In 2008, Grammy-award winner Kathy Mattea released an album of songs entitled "Coal," which included covers of some of the most famous coal-mining songs, such as "Dark as a Dungeon" by Merle Travis. Its lyrics reflect the tension between the pride and pain that forms much of the dialogue about mining, which is described here as a kind of addiction:

Come and listen you fellows, so young and so fine,
And seek not your fortune in the dark, dreary mines.
It will form as a habit and seep in your soul,
'Till the stream of your blood is as black as the coal.
It's dark as a dungeon and damp as the dew,
Where danger is double and pleasures are few,
Where the rain never falls and the sun never shines
It's dark as a dungeon way down in the mine.
It's a-many a man I have seen in my day,
Who lived just to labor his whole life away.
Like a fiend with his dope and a drunkard his wine,
A man will have lust for the lure of the mines.
I hope when I'm gone and the ages shall roll,
My body will blacken and turn into coal.
Then I'll look from the door of my heavenly home,
And pity the miner a-diggin' my bones.

Services. While the Appalachian region has long been associated with mining, some of the largest sources of economic growth in the last 50 years have moved people away from the land, into the service sector. As reported by Shannon (2006), the largest source of regional economic and employment growth from 1970 to 1980 was in health services, retail trade, and education. Once again, an examination of the economic changes in West Virginia, which historically offered the most mining and manufacturing opportunities, provides a window into the broader changes being experienced in the region. In Maggard's (1994) investigation of West Virginia, she noted the state's loss of roughly 70,000 mining and manufacturing jobs over just a ten-year period (1977 to 1987). These jobs averaged about \$36,400 annual salary. During this same time period Maggard (1994) reported that there were 31,988 new service sector jobs gained, with average annual salaries of \$15,000. This economic restructuring of the state resulted in overwhelming consequences (Maggard, 1994). Many people fled the state, and poverty and unemployment rates rose. These trends were seen throughout the region. While jobs in mining and manufacturing continued to plummet from the 1980s and into the 2000s, Shannon (2006) reported that, "the long-term prospects of traditional manufacturing industry and coal mining were almost uniformly dismal," (p. 79).

Since being established in 1963 much of the economic development in the region has been led by the Appalachian Regional Commission, which was part of Johnson's declared War on Poverty. The ARC's controversial approach originally attempted to open up new career opportunities through large-scale modernization, which met with very little sustained success (Eller, 2008; Shannon, 2006). Consequently, the ARC has attempted to focus on smaller projects, including retirement and tourism, as well as other niche industries (Shannon, 2006). However, the majority of Appalachian people appear to have limited options, and while all

workers have had to seek alternative employments, young people entering the workforce have been faced with shrinking opportunities for career growth (Eller, 2008).

Research in career development. Young people in Appalachia have proven to be significantly aware of limited job opportunities in the region, and research has indicated the strong influence of a number of cultural factors on individuals' vocational outlook. Yet there has been relatively little attention paid to relationships between culture and the meaning of work among these populations, and research often appears to be biased towards college attendance, viewing vocational education or direct school-to-work transitions as "second-rate" options (Ali & McWhirter, 2006). Multicultural researchers have pointed out the danger of assuming technical or "unskilled" occupations as default options for those from lower SES backgrounds, and Liu and Ali (2005) emphasized the need to assess whether or not these occupations may truly hold interest for workers. Kinzie (1999) also noted that many jobs that require technical training are consistent with Appalachian cultural values, such as the importance of the land and the value of physical labor. Recently, a handful of quantitative studies have begun to explore the career development of young people in the region. For the most part, research has focused on social cognitive career theory (SCCT; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). Results have indicated the importance of cultural context in career decisions, particularly in participants' perceived barriers or access to opportunities.

Ali and McWhirter (2006) conducted an exploratory study researching the vocational and educational aspirations of rural Appalachian youth using a framework of social cognitive career theory (SCCT). Their stated purpose was to examine, "whether a specific set of SCCT predictor variables accounted for the postsecondary vocational pathways aspired to by rural Appalachian high school students," (p. 92). These predictor variables included: vocational/educational self-

efficacy and outcome expectations; background contextual variables of parental, sibling, peer, and teacher support; SES; perception of school characteristics; and barriers to postsecondary education, as measured by “Likelihood” and “Difficulty” subscales. Ali and McWhirter examined the influence of these variables on four different pathways:

- (a) Obtaining a bachelor’s degree and subsequently pursuing a graduate degree, (b) obtaining a bachelor’s degree after high school, (c) pursuing vocational technical training with the intent of pursuing employment in a specific vocational technical area, or (d) obtaining full-time employment without training or education. (p. 92)

Participants included 338 (182 male, 156 female) 11th-graders from five high schools in Appalachian towns of fewer than 10,000 people. The mean age of participants was 16.5 and racial demographics of the sample were representative of the region. Sixty of these students were randomly grouped into a cross-validation sample. Ali and McWhirter noted that the estimated proportion of regional minors living in poverty was 30%, and that unemployment in the area at the time was the highest in the nation (6.7%, vs. national unemployment at 4.1%).

Ali and McWhirter (2006) found that vocational/educational self-efficacy beliefs, college outcome expectations, SES, and the likelihood of encountering barriers to postsecondary education all contributed significantly to the prediction of the four proposed postsecondary pathways. When compared to participants aspiring to bachelor’s and professional degrees, those participants with aspirations to find work after high school (rather than going to college) had lower outcome expectations associated with college, lower vocation/educational self-efficacy expectations, lower SES, and higher likelihood of encountering postsecondary education barriers. Results also indicated that SCCT variables more accurately predicted the aspirations of participants who hoped for the highest forms of education than those of participants with

aspirations that did not include a college education. Overall, while SCCT variables were significantly better than chance at predicting pathways and classifying Appalachian high school students, the effect size was small enough to warrant further investigation into factors that contributed to educational and vocational aspirations. In addition, the results indicated that the model may have limited applications to those uninterested in attending college.

Russ (2006) also used SCCT to examine the effects of Appalachian culture on career choice. Her primary hypothesis was that family background, trust levels, career self-efficacy, and career interests influence career choice among Appalachian youth to a differing degree than for non-Appalachian youth. She highlighted self-efficacy as the mediating variable between background and outcome. Russ recruited 131 sophomore high school students from a metropolitan area far enough outside of a city to be similar to a small town. Participants averaged 15.7 years of age, with a representative racial distribution. All participants self-identified as being of the Appalachian culture. Instruments included a self-report questionnaire that included questions about currently planned and ideal occupations, as well as a self-efficacy scale, an interest assessment, and a measure of levels of trust.

Using several statistical analyses, Russ (2006) found support for her hypotheses. Pertaining to her primary hypothesis, path analysis revealed that career choice was influenced both directly and indirectly by trust, career self-efficacy, and career interests, as mediated by self-efficacy. Trust levels demonstrated a significant positive path to career self-efficacy for Appalachians, a relationship that was not found for non-Appalachians. Family background was also shown to have more influence on the career self-efficacy and career choice among Appalachian students than non-Appalachians. Self-efficacy levels for interests and choice were also linked to regional group differences: Appalachians' self-efficacy indicated a positive

influence in Health Services (e.g., medicine, nursing, occupational therapy) and Industrial/Engineering (e.g., manufacturing, construction, and transportation) clusters, and a negative influence on Business and Management (mostly white collar occupations). These interests may have indicated the importance of the models that many adolescents see in their environment, given the higher levels of employment in the service sector and industry. Career self-efficacy for both Appalachians and non-Appalachians was significantly related to family income, mothers' and fathers' educational levels, and the prestige level of presented career choices.

Russ (2006) also examined whether or not Appalachian students would demonstrate greater trust in kinship relationships than organizational figures when compared to non-Appalachian students. Interestingly, there was no significant difference in trust levels between the two groups: t-tests were non-significant for overall trust levels, family trust, and outsider trust. These findings did not support a large body of research indicating a strong distrust for outsiders among Appalachians, and the authors reported that this may be due to the geographical area in which the participants lived, which was relatively close to a larger city. However, levels of trust between Appalachian and non-Appalachian participants were significantly different in their influence on career self-efficacy, and positive levels of trust significantly related to higher self-efficacy among Appalachian participants (non-Appalachian participants' trust levels demonstrated a near zero path).

Russ's (2006) results indicated interesting differences between Appalachian and non-Appalachian students, as well as male and female participants. When converted to Holland codes, 52% of Appalachian males indicated desires for *Realistic* careers, as compared to 39% of non-Appalachian males. Among Appalachian females, 54% indicated desires for Social careers,

as compared to 33% of non-Appalachian females. In her discussion, Russ (2006) indicated the need for further research, particularly regarding the reasons why Appalachians are more likely to go into blue-collar work rather than white-collar. As stated by Russ (2006):

Because there are over 23 million Appalachians in the US and they occupy a substantial position in the labor force, effort should be made to explore the reasons for this restriction of career choice for the population. (p. 140)

Russ also noted the lack of exploration regarding how stereotypes may influence the career development of the Appalachian people.

In a study similar to Ali and Saunders' (2006) exploration of the educational aspirations of Appalachian high school students, the same authors again used SCCT to explore the career aspirations of a similar population (Ali & Saunders, 2009). Participants included 63 high school students (9th – 12th graders) living in central, rural Appalachia. The sample was generally representative of the larger community and included 27 males and 35 females. Several measures were used to examine the influence of SCCT factors, including SES, age, parent support, sibling support, peer support, vocational/educational self-efficacy, career decision outcome expectations, and career aspirations.

Results indicated that 52% of the variance in career aspirations was accounted for by the SCCT variables. Standardized coefficients revealed that high levels of SES, vocational/educational self-efficacy beliefs, and career decision outcome expectations significantly predicted career aspirations. SCCT factors that were not significant predictors of career aspirations included age, parent support, sibling support, and friend support. Further analysis revealed that the three strongest associations were among career aspirations and the variables of vocational/educational self-efficacy, career decision outcome expectations, and SES.

These domain specific variables thus accounted for more than half of the variance in career aspirations. It is important to note the authors' definition of the most influential of these variables (vocational/educational self-efficacy): "self-efficacy beliefs or confidence associated with completing both academic and vocational tasks in high school (consistent with Appalachian high school curriculum)," (p. 183). Thus the authors concluded that there is a relationship between SCCT factors and career aspirations; however, they noted that further research is needed in order to better understand the vocational development of this population. They encouraged qualitative research in order to, "shed more light on the specific aspects of Appalachian culture that impact students' career aspirations," (p. 186).

In what is, to my knowledge, the only report of vocation and Appalachian culture to appear in the *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, Robinson, Davis, and Meara (2003) examined the motivational influences of occupational possible selves among 198 low-income rural Appalachian women. Possible selves are defined as the personalized representations of the self in the future. Inherent motivational properties include concreteness (i.e., the more concrete one's vision of a future self, the more motivational the possible self), affect (i.e., the emotional investment one has in the possible self), balance between hoped-for and feared possible selves, self-initiated actions or behaviors, and personal efficacy (i.e., confidence in achieving the possible self). Robinson et al. hypothesized that each of these five motivational variables would significantly contribute to the variance in the prediction of participants' perceptions of achieving a hoped for possible self and avoiding a feared possible self.

Samples were drawn from two sources in eight rural Tennessee counties: the Department of Human Services (DHS) and developmental education classes (DEV). The authors hypothesized that the DEV group, due to their higher levels of education, would score higher on

each of the predictor variables and would generate more hoped-for and feared selves.

Regression analyses indicated that four of the five variables accounted for a significant amount of variance in the prediction of participants' perceived likelihood of achieving their most hoped-for self. Only the variable "balance" did not evidence a significant relationship. As predicted, those in the DEV group evidenced some significant differences in the motivational variables of occupational selves; however, the overall differences were minimal.

Further examination of the motivational variables revealed some important trends in the participants. For example, how well participants knew someone in their most hoped-for occupation (a variable that is important in the "modeling" component of SCCT), contributed to almost 13% of the change in variance in the equation predicting the self-reported likelihood of achieving one's most hoped-for self. In the same equation, affect accounted for over 10% of the variance; the four variables together accounted for almost 40% of the overall variance. In contrast, none of the variables significantly predicted participants' likelihood of avoiding their most feared selves. Both groups recorded significantly more hoped-for selves than feared selves, and several participants stated that they had no feared selves. It is important to note, however, that participants, "believed it to be significantly less likely that they would avoid a most feared self than achieve a most hoped-for one," (p. 163). For those participants who described feared selves, they were just as likely to know someone in their feared occupation as the one that they most hoped to obtain.

Using SCCT, Rieder Bennett (2008) conducted a multi-disciplinary review of the literature exploring the contextual affordances of people from Appalachia. According to SCCT, contextual affordances are the environmental resources or barriers that relate to vocational development. These affordances may become salient during the decision-making process

(proximal) or may occur before the learning experiences that influence self-efficacy development and outcome expectations (distal). As explained by Rieder Bennett, distal affordances may limit career interests and goals through limiting learning experiences and efficacy building, as well as by creating inaccuracy in outcome expectations. Proximal affordances, such as sexism, racism, and socioeconomic status, may influence goals and actions. Rieder Bennett's review of vocational and academic studies in the region revealed "several problematic outcomes of contextual affordances in this population," (p. 248). While noting that there is little research on the vocational development of Appalachian people, Rieder Bennett discussed four possible contextual affordances, including structural inequalities, gender, stereotypes and discrimination, and family.

With regards to structural inequalities, Rieder Bennett (2008) speculated that Appalachia's relative isolation may function as both a proximal and distal contextual affordance. Distally, she stated that isolation may decrease access to opportunities for learning experiences; proximally, isolation may limit the availability of resources for vocational development. However, Rieder Bennett was quick to note the relative lack of vocational research on the Appalachian people, and stated that, "further research is necessary to fully understand the effect of isolation as both a distal and proximal contextual affordance among Appalachians," (p. 249).

Poverty was another structural inequality examined by Rieder Bennett (2008). She noted that studies in sociology have revealed a link among poverty and depression, anxiety, and somatic complaints. Those living in poverty also revealed a tendency to rely on family and friends, community, and their religious faith in order to cope with stress; however, research has also revealed more disturbing tendencies to turn to substance abuse and social withdrawal.

Rieder Bennett emphasized the need to explore the effects of poverty and unemployment on vocational development.

Rieder Bennett (2008) also explored gender and discrimination as possible contextual affordances. Rieder Bennett noted that gender has not been specifically studied among the Appalachian population; however, she assumed that the strict gender roles apparent in Appalachian society may function as limiting distal and proximal affordances, leading to gender-stereotyped self-efficacy and outcome expectations. In addition, Rieder Bennett speculated that the discrimination people from the region face due to the negative stereotypes about Appalachia may lead to difficulties gaining work and education outside of the region. Discrimination by out-groups may therefore disrupt the connection between goals and accomplishment. Thus, while there is little empirical evidence regarding these contextual factors, issues of gender, discrimination, and stereotyping may be potentially detrimental to self-efficacy, predicted outcomes, and goal attainment.

Rieder Bennett (2008) reported that family can be one of the most influential contextual affordances for Appalachians, providing both resources and deficits. In reviewing the literature, Rieder Bennett noted that sociologists have confirmed the importance of “family-level social capital” which involves encouragement, discipline, reputation maintenance, access to resources, and emotional and financial support. On the other hand, commitment to family may maintain poverty levels if individuals foreclose on vocational or educational goals in order to remain with the family. Rieder Bennett encouraged vocational researchers to assess parental years of education, highest education completed, and educational resources available in the home in order to assess the influence of family as resources or barriers to educational and vocational goals. She

also encouraged the use of qualitative research methods, noting that quantitative instruments have not been normed with Appalachian populations.

In 2007, Tang and Russ further explored the career development of the Appalachian people by integrating SCCT and ecological frameworks to create a model for career interventions. They started by first identifying cultural values and their impact on vocational issues. Tang and Russ (2007) focused on seven cultural domains:

distrust of outsiders and institutions, strong family and kinship ties, strong church and community ties, patriarchal socialization, oral tradition, strong values for equality and independence, preference for the concrete, family responsibilities over educational values. (p. 37)

Tang and Russ (2007) examined each of these values and described their limiting effects on career development. They posited that the cultural value of *distrust of outsiders and institutions* impacted career by narrowing one's exposure to career options. *Strong family and kinship ties* may also limit options because children are more likely to follow in the vocational footsteps of their parents, and are more open to family influences for job exploration and placement. Tang and Russ noted the possible limiting impact of Appalachian cultural values in discussing *strong church and community ties*, emphasizing that links to community could restrict career possibilities, and links to religion could limit jobs to only church-sanctioned occupations. They noted that *patriarchal socialization* leads to high gender segregation in career exploration and placement. Values of *equality* and *independence*, according to Tang and Russ (2007), lead to a preference for jobs where skills are appreciated and where the worker has some degree of control over his or her responsibilities. These values also lead to wariness of being "beholden" to those outside of the kinship group for career advice or access (p. 37). With regards to education and

training, the authors noted a preference for oral over written information, and stated that “students benefit more from exposure to job sites rather than reading or hearing about careers,” (p. 37). Finally, Tang and Russ emphasized that family needs, particularly those of a financial nature, may take precedence over the educational plans of an individual. Overall, the authors seemed to view Appalachian cultural values as negatively impacting career development.

Tang and Russ (2007) then proposed a model of career intervention that focuses on person-environment interactions, the Career Intervention Model for People of Appalachia (CIMPAC). The authors noted:

The uniqueness of CIMPAC is its emphasis on making an effort to apply an understanding of culture to assess the ecosystem of individuals . . . to identify resources/assets and barriers in order to optimize the individual environmental concordance. (p. 40)

Tang and Russ’s (2007) CIMPAC model is based on empirical research of Appalachian cultural values; however, to my knowledge there is no empirical evidence supporting the use of the model in practice. Nevertheless, their examination of the links between Appalachian cultural values and career development created a helpful paradigm for practitioners and researchers in the field of vocational psychology. Unfortunately, even though several of the model’s foundational principles implied the use of cultural resources, Tang and Russ’s (2007) basic assumptions appear to approach many Appalachian values as limiting, rather than helpful.

In contrast to Tang and Russ (2007), a qualitative investigation by Helton and Keller (2010) articulated how traditional Appalachian values greatly contributed to resiliency among regional women. Although work was not an explicit focus of the study, the participants ($n = 10$; mean age 64) talked about cultural values and resiliency in relation to jobs, family, and

education. The values studied included independence, self-reliance, and pride; neighborliness; familism; personalism (i.e., respecting and not offending others); religion; humility and modesty; love of place; sense of beauty; and sense of humor. All but patriotism were cited as assets to participants' resiliency in the face of several challenges, including:

Living within a patriarchal family system, dealing with the negative effects of poverty, dealing with the hardships of rural life such as the geographic isolation of mountain communities, lack of transportation, walking miles to school, not having stores and other conveniences nearby, harsh working conditions, closing of the coal mines, lack of employment, . . . experiencing prejudice and discrimination in urban areas because of the "hillbilly image," and other negative stereotypes. (p. 155)

Of particular interest were the women's discussions of the values of independence, self-reliance, and pride. All of the participants reported being taught to be proud of their skills; they described being, "empowered by their parents to rely on themselves and were encouraged to set high goals," (p. 158). These experiences created a strong, positive individual identity that was nonetheless linked to their collective cultural values. The women all indicated the importance of a sense of purpose, and that with the help of God and family they could reach any goal if they tried hard enough.

It is clear that cultural values influence career development and choice in Appalachia. However, to my knowledge there are no qualitative investigations exploring how people from the region view their cultural values in relation to career development. Some researchers argue that cultural values may limit any true exploration of possible career options, while others note the importance of cultural values in being able to set and obtain goals. This study will answer the

call to gain a better understanding of the relationship among culture, values, and career development by exploring their relationships to the meaning of work.

Connections to the land and importance of place. People of Appalachia, even those who are no longer physically connected to the region, report a strong bond to the land itself. Russ (2010) stated that this bond may be attributed to the strong connection mountain people feel to their families, which form the social hierarchies of many Appalachian communities. Others have linked the strong sense of place to the religious faith that dominates the region, leading to a sense of stewardship and spiritual connection (Helton & Keller, 2010; Russ, 2010; Wagner, 2006). Whatever the origin, themes of homesickness and love for the natural features of the region are commonly repeated. Russ (2010) cited an experience shared by one of her colleagues that demonstrated the strength of this bond, even when one has moved away from the region:

some thirty years ago an urban Appalachian man came to a Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR) office in eastern Cincinnati with several fingers of his left hand lost in an industrial accident. He wanted a judgment of disability so he could return to his home community in eastern Kentucky. He was advised by the attending psychologist that his disability was minor and he could return to work with only a few restrictions.

Some six months later he returned to the same BVR office and met with the same psychologist. He was now missing his left arm from just below the elbow. The

Appalachian man looked at the psychologist and asked, "Now, can I go home?" (pp. 4-5)

As this example shows, migration outside of Appalachia does little to decrease feelings of connection to the land (Obermiller & Howe, 2007; Obermiller & Maloney, 1994; Jones, 2002).

In fact, some feel stronger ties to Appalachia once they leave, and make conscious efforts to

perpetuate their cultural identity in an attempt to distinguish themselves from majority culture (Jones, 2002).

Appalachian regional identity and connection to place has been chronicled in many songs, stories, crafts and poems. Jones (1994) attributed much of the naturalist themes of traditional Appalachian art to the inherent sense of beauty within the culture, and the closeness this brings between the land and its people. Appalachian music, especially, may serve not only to express love for the land, but also as an instrument that binds people to the land. Singer and songwriter Hazel Dickens spoke about the way Appalachian music strengthened her identity and connection to place:

I felt terribly inferior when I came to the city. People were always putting down my accent. I was very confused about my identity and what my role was, anywhere. I was quite lonely actually. . . . We'd go out to some bar, and sometimes, if it was a country band playing, we would enjoy ourselves. The larger portion of the people were country people and they'd get all dressed up and come and listen to the music and dance all night. (Carawan & Carawan, 1975, p. 69)

Again, some of the most poignant expressions of love for the region have come from those who have had to leave (Carawan & Carawan, 1975). Another Appalachian singer, Jean Ritchie, expressed it this way:

I celebrate the fact that this Appalachia has a hold on me. Wherever I go, I'm of these hills. That little cabin at the head of the holler has been in the back of my mind, like an anchor with a long rope, all the time I've been having to make a home for my family elsewhere—and someday soon I mean to build that cabin, because here is where I belong. No one has to tell me that—I know. (Carawan & Carawan, 1975, p. 77)

Ritchie's words succinctly express the bond among personal and collective identity, a sense of home, and the natural landscapes of Appalachia.

Appalachian values have grown within unique historical and social frameworks, leading to a modern society with a distinctive culture. Issues of trust, exploitation, dialect, collectivism, family and gender roles, spirituality, substance abuse, and connections to the land all influence educational goals and vocational development. However, the people of Appalachia are an almost "invisible minority" (Mei & Russ, 2007) in mainstream American culture. With more than 25 million people in the region and countless others who preserve their cultural roots in spite of outward migration, this is an important sub-sect of the American population (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2011a). In addition, due to the historical and current significance of mining on both regional and national stages, studies of the relationships between culture and vocational development are increasingly important. Unfortunately, these relationships have yet to be deeply investigated by psychologists. This study will explore issues of culture and identity in the career development of Appalachians, thus answering a broader call for multicultural contexts in the field of psychology at large.

Multicultural Contexts in Identity

As global populations trend toward increasing levels of diversity, counseling psychologists are tasked with meeting the evolving needs of a multicultural clientele (Leong & Hartung, 2000; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Pedersen, 1991). The racial and ethnic compositions of the United States are shifting dramatically and the modal citizen may no longer identify strictly as "Caucasian" or "European American." This shift was evident in the 2010 U. S. Census, which attributed more than half of the total population growth to the increase in the Hispanic population alone. The percentage of the population identifying as solely "white"

(excluding those identifying as “Hispanic”) grew at the slowest rate (1%) of all identified races (U. S. Census, 2010a). However, the diversity of American populations cannot be measured exclusively by skin color or nation of origin; rather the key to diversity is found in examinations of culture.

As described by the American Psychological Association (APA; 2002), culture encompasses, “the embodiment of a worldview through learned and transmitted beliefs, values, and practices, including religious and spiritual traditions. It also encompasses a way of living informed by the historical, economic, ecological, and political forces on a group,” (p. 8). As such, culture is a fluid and dynamic entity, defined not just by what it “is” but by what it “does” (Keefe, 2005). Because all people, no matter their race or ethnicity, may identify with multiple cultures, it is impossible to enumerate how many cultures exist within the U.S. (APA 2002; Wilder & Shapiro, 1984). However, statistical investigations into social, economic, historical, and geographic characteristics confirm previous projections regarding the decline of a homogeneous, mainstream majority culture. This decline is particularly evident among the American labor force, which increasingly reflects the growing diversity of populations (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1993; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010; U. S. Census, 2000).

Counseling experts have long recognized the need for culture-centered vocational research in order to meet the changing needs of workers (APA, 2002; Roe, 1956; Sue et al., 1982; Sue & Sue, 2003; Swanson & Gore, 2000). Contemporary perspectives in career psychology advocate strongly for the study of work as inseparable, even central, to understanding human behavior within cultural frameworks (Blustein, 2006; Schultheiss, 2007; Stead, 2004; Young & Collin, 2004). Within the U.S., the centrality of work in cultural experience is perhaps nowhere more evident than among the Appalachian people.

Appalachian cultural history is inextricably linked to its economic and labor systems, which have been dominated by coal mining since the 19th century (Shannon, 2006). In spite of these links, it is evident that “Appalachian cultural identity has received little attention from Appalachian studies scholars, perhaps because of Appalachians’ reluctance to set themselves apart as a cultural group,” (Keefe, 2005, pp. 13-14). This reluctance may have contributed to the lack of focused investigation into the reciprocal influence of cultural and vocational identities among mountain people. However, career development research with other groups (e.g., African Americans, women, and men who have sex with men) has demonstrated that ignoring interactions among cultural vocational identities may lead to biased and inaccurate accounts of human psychological experience within a vocational context.

Multiculturalism in psychology. To be fair, the use of multicultural research paradigms is relatively new to the field of psychology in general and vocational psychology in particular. Multiculturalism experienced several developmental stages before being projected as the “fourth force” in psychology, following psychoanalysis, behaviorism, and humanism (Pedersen, 1990, 1991, 2000). Multicultural research was considered to be in its infancy until the late 1980s (Ponterotto, Casas, Suzuki, & Alexander, 2010), at which time two models of multicultural counseling began to dominate the literature: the counseling competency model (Sue et al., 1982; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992) and the racial identity development model (Helms, 1984, 1992). These models emphasized the importance of *cultural responsiveness* in counseling. As cited by Ponterotto et al. (2010), Atkinson and Lowe (1995) defined culturally responsive therapy as the use of interventions that, “acknowledge the existence of, show interest in, demonstrate knowledge of, and express appreciation for the client’s ethnicity and culture and that place the client’s problem in a cultural context,” (p. 641).

Expanded views of cultural meaning-making have led to calls for an integration of social justice into vocational psychology and psychological theory in general (Goodman et al., 2004; Vera & Speight, 2003). Inherent within social justice approaches is the need to understand cultural values, strengths, and barriers in attempting to equalize distribution of rights and resources throughout multiple systems (Goodman et al., 2004; Vera & Speight, 2003). Goodman et al. (2004) recommended the implementation of six principles in socially conscious research and practice: ongoing self-examination, equalizing power differentials, giving voice to the voiceless, facilitating consciousness-raising on individual and system levels, building on strengths, and leaving clients with tools that empower them to work toward social change. The growth of the social justice paradigm among counseling psychologists has led to culturally responsive models that re-define psychology as an instrument for advocacy and social change.

Culturally sensitive counseling is required in all areas of psychology, including vocational psychology. As stated by Fouad and Bingham (1995), “The goal of career counseling is not to have all clients make the same choices but to help clients make career choices that are culturally appropriate,” (p. 333). However, as stated previously, each person is defined by a number of cultural identities, the salience of which may change situationally. For example, a person may employ values and practices that are highly identifiable with one identity (e.g., “West Virginian”) and not another (e.g., “atheist”) when making a career decision. It is therefore important to understand the process by which a person or group differentiates themselves in any given cultural context. Some of the most basic socio-cultural and interpersonal contexts include the constructs of individual and group identity and stereotyping.

Individual and group identity. According to Sue and Sue (2003) there are three levels of identity: universal, individual, and group. Universal identity refers to the common

experiences that define human existence, such as birth, death, love, hate, and the unique responses of the human body (Sue & Sue, 2003). What differentiates individuals within the human race however, are conceptualizations of individual and group identity. Individual identity, described as the “self” by William James (1890), consists of thoughts and beliefs about the self as well as awareness of how we think about the self (Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 2004). Group identity (also referred to as “social identity”) involves shared ethnicity, cultural beliefs and values, and can be as varied as the different groups to which one belongs (Sue & Sue, 2003; Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002). Most counseling research on identity has been conducted within a Western cultural framework, which emphasizes individual identity and achievement (Triandis, 1989), and thus may perpetuate a bias against shared experiences and multicultural identity (Ellemers et al., 2002; Smith, Richards, Granley, & Obiakor, 2004; Sue & Sue, 2003). In spite of the apparent differences among these levels of identity, research indicates that the development of individual and group identities is inextricably linked.

Individual identity. Individual identity is a centralized and continuous awareness of who one is, as comprised of one’s characteristics, preferences, goals, values, and behavior patterns (Baumeister, 1998; Howard, 2000). These components create what are known as “self-schemas” or cognitions that organize information about the self (Howard, 2000). Becoming aware of these components is an essential task in the human development of personality and behavioral functioning (Broderick & Blewitt, 2003; Erikson, 1975; Thomas & Schwarzbaum, 2006). As viewed through the lens of traditional developmental models, identity development mirrors cognitive development throughout childhood and early adolescence (Montemayor & Eisen, 1977). Piaget recognized that the cognitive shift from concrete to formal operations allows a child to recognize multiple perspectives (“decentralization”), and therefore compare her own

experience to that of others (Broderick & Blewitt, 2003). Our personal identity therefore evolves from a concrete to an abstract conceptualization: while childhood identities may focus on physical factors (Montemayor & Eisen, 1977), adolescence brings considerations of our own thoughts and feelings, as well as how we are perceived by others and how we might enhance our sense of personal worth within a social structure (Hart & Damon, 1986; Livesley & Bromley, 1973).

As a result of cognitive maturity, the self develops within a social structure comprised of “in-groups” and “out-groups.” People recognize the group to which they belong, as well as where these groups fit within the larger social hierarchy. The salience of any particular identity may be dictated by the fluidity of cultural meanings in different contexts (Featherstone, 1991). Our identities are subsequently shaped by social interactions as we learn to classify others on different dimensions and become aware of being classified by others in return (Quintana, Castenada-English, & Ybarra, 1999). Personal identity thus takes shape within a cultural context; identity is built not only on awareness of the culture to which one belongs, but on awareness of out-group cultures and what they think of one’s own culture.

Definitions of the self vary by culture, yet different cultures are relatively poorly represented in the literature. Current research generally separates identity conceptualization into Western and non-Western idioms (Aronson et al., 2004). Markus and Kitayama (1991) identified this “so-called Western view” of individual identity as “an independent, self-contained, autonomous entity who (a) comprises a unique configuration of internal attributes . . . and (b) behaves primarily as a consequence of these internal attributes,” (p. 224). This definition has been empirically supported by a significant body of research on the self in relation to *one’s own* thoughts, feelings, and behaviors rather than on the self in relation to the thoughts, feelings,

and behaviors of others (Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1988; Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999; Kitayama & Markus, 1994; Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997; Markus, Kitayama & Heiman, 1996). The Western paradigm has traditionally dominated vocational psychology research (Carter & Swanson, 1990; Fouad, 1993; Herr, 1996; Subich, 1996).

The “non-Western” or interdependent view of the self assumes that one’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviors may result from the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others (Aronson et al., 2004). Such a self-view permeates every aspect of individual development, and has been shown to be highly influential in career development. Investigations into career decision-making and vocational identity among “non-Western” cultures have indicated strong interactions between the actions of the individual and collectivist values. For example, results from vocational studies of Asian participants have indicated that those from traditional Asian backgrounds tend to view career within a relational context, thus regarding career success as a familial accomplishment (Leong, 1986). Others have found that Asian Americans are more likely to answer questions by referring to social groups than their Western counterparts (Bochner, 1994; Triandis, 1989). This collectivist, relational perspective may therefore influence career choice, as well as the meanings of work within Asian and Asian-American cultural contexts (Tang, 2002; Zane et al., 2004). Research conducted among Native Americans has demonstrated the motivating role of helping family and community in career decision-making (Brown & Lavish, 2006; Jackson & Turner, 2004), as well as the importance of parental support and gender in predicting career self-efficacy (Turner & Lapan, 2003). Studies of Latina career development have indicated the powerful influence of socioeconomic status, family, cultural identity, and perceived support networks (Gomez et al., 2001). Gushue (2006; Gushue, Clarke,

Pantzer, & Scanlan, 2006) advocated for the consideration of the role of ethnic identity and collectivistic values in vocational exploration and the vocational identity of Latino high school students.

It is important to note that collectivistic (“non-Western”) values exist in many “Western” cultures. As shown previously, studies of Appalachian culture have underscored cultural values of family and community participation in decision-making, thus evidencing core collectivistic values (Fisher, 1993; Russ, 2010; Walls & Billings, 2002; Welch, 1999). While the importance of the self in identity formation is vital in both individualist and collectivist cultures, exploration of behavioral options appears to be consistently rooted in the self’s relationships to family, friends, community, and society, and the social identity that evolves through these relationships (Broderick & Blewitt, 2003).

Group identity. Group identities are formed within historical and cultural frameworks. As stated previously, a person’s group or social identity may vary depending on situational context and may involve, among other things, shared ethnicity, region of origin, experiences, language, cultural beliefs and values. Thus, every individual possesses multiple social identities or memberships in multiple in-groups (Wilder & Shapiro, 1984). As cited by Ellemers, Kortekaas, and Ouwerkerk (1999), Tajfel (1978) created what has become the standard definition of social identity: “. . . that *part* of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership,” (p. 372). As expanded by Ellemers et al. (1999), this definition describes three dimensions of social identity: a person must have a *cognitive* understanding of his or her membership within a group (“self-categorization”), must *evaluate* the group and assign a certain value to group membership (“group self-esteem”), and

then must develop an “affective commitment” or *emotional* bond to the group. In spite of more than 30 years of research, theorists have yet to agree upon the mechanisms behind the creation of a multi-dimensional social identity, and thus there are a number of approaches to intergroup differentiation (Pickett, Bonner, & Coleman, 2002).

Group differentiation. A substantial body of research has demonstrated that individuals are attracted to and bond significantly with groups who verify their self-concept (Swann, Stein-Seroussi, & Giesler, 1992; see Swann, Rentfrow, & Guinn, 2003, for a review). Not only are people attracted to similar others, but they actively seek verification from others regarding views of the self that they feel are valuable or important (Chen, Chen, & Shaw, 2004). Allport (1954) noted the importance of such processes in the interaction between the self and social identities, as individuals participate in the creation and maintenance of in-group/out-group differentiation. Several modern theories explore the antecedents and possible consequences of group differentiation, and most fall within the parameters of two theoretical groupings.

The two major schools of intergroup differentiation consist of instrumental and identity theories. Those that conceptualize differentiation in terms of conflict over competing group interests are known as “instrumental” or “reciprocity” theories. As described by Hewstone (2007), instrumental motivations for group differentiation involve achieving certain goals (usually aimed at increasing access to resources), as opposed to placing a group within a certain social structure. Creation and maintenance of a social structure is the proposed motivation behind the second group of theories, “identity” or “categorization” theories. These conceptualize differentiation in terms of individualistic needs within social contexts (Hewstone, 2007). Social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), self-categorization theory (SCT; Turner, Hogg,

Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 1991), and subjective uncertainty reduction theory (Grieve & Hogg, 1999) are considered identity theories.

While both instrumental and identity theories have been studied separately, many theorists have called for their integration. As reported by Hewstone (2007), the first study to do so successfully was by Scheepers, Branscombe, Spears, and Doosje (2002). Their results indicated that instrumental motivations may be secondary to those of identity, or, as stated by Hewstone, “the identity function is more basic, needing to be fulfilled before an instrumental function can operate,” (p. 183). It may be partly for this reason that theories of social identity appear more prominently in the literature.

Social identity theory. Social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) is one of the most influential of the social cognitive theories of identity (Howard, 2000). All social cognitive theories are built on several assumptions: human cognitive capacity is limited, and we are therefore “cognitive misers” who attempt to streamline information in order to manage the multiple cognitive demands of everyday living. This streamlining process consists of categorizing information about people, objects, and situations in packages that the brain can access quickly, without the need to make inferences or engage in memory processes (Augoustinos & Walker, 1995; Fiske & Taylor, 1991). SIT proposes that individuals define their identities along a continuum of social and personal categories and the interplay between the two (Deaux, 1993).

Howard (2000) explained the two extremes of this continuum in terms of “schemas”: self-schemas contain the organized knowledge that one has about one’s characteristics, preferences, goals, and behavior patterns. Group schemas, on the other hand, contain organized knowledge about social positions and stratification statuses (i.e., gender, race, class). In other

words, group schemas are essentially prototypes or stereotypes (Howard, 2000). As stereotypes, group schemas are easily accessible cognitively; however, they are not always accurate.

Therefore, the explanations and justifications provided by such schemas create evaluative, sociopolitical frameworks within which one categorizes the self and others. Those aspects of the social group that the individual finds meaningful, positive, or important create the foundation upon which an individual will build his or her collective identity (Simon & Hastedt, 1999). In building on this foundation of meaningful and positive group traits, social identity theory posits that people make strong positive attributions to their in-group. However, as opposed to more instrumental, conflict driven theories, SIT does not propose that in-group bias necessitates the derogation of out-groups (Brewer, 1999). Tajfel and Turner (1986) indicated that people are motivated to differentiate groups in an effort to create and/or maintain a more positive social identity, not to create or perpetuate a negative out-group identity.

Several studies of socially meaningful groups have indicated the importance of “group status” or hierarchy on in-group commitment (Ellemers, 1993; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Those in lower status groups do not always accept their place in the social hierarchy as an indication that they are somehow “less than” those in higher status groups. Tajfel and Turner (1986) stated that, “negative social identity promotes subordinate-group competitiveness toward the dominant group to the degree that . . . subjective identification with the subordinate group is maintained,” (p. 21). In other words, given certain cultural parameters, non-dominant social groups may compete with more dominant groups, which often only serves to reinforce the status quo. Such a struggle gives credence to social justification theory (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004), which states that people tend to exhibit out-group favoritism in order to justify an existing social hierarchy.

Without such justification, people who are minorities may experience an uncomfortable degree of uncertainty and cognitive dissonance.

As seen in parts of Appalachia, members in minority or non-dominant groups have also been found to conceptualize themselves from a more collective standpoint, rather than an individual one (Simon, Hastedt, & Aufderheide, 1997). As shown in multiple studies, this tendency to self-categorize leads to a depersonalized perception of the self, defined more by the group identity than the individual identity (Brewer & Weber, 1994; Mullen, 1991; Simon & Hamilton, 1994). Some theorists argue that people self-categorize as members of non-dominant groups when such categorization becomes meaningful through “fit” with the immediate situation and the cognitive schemas of the perceiver (Oakes, 1987; Simon et al., 1997). This fit principle is one of the guiding assumptions of self-categorization theory, which states that a particular social categorization becomes salient only if it is meaningful (or “fits”) within a given social context (Oakes, 1987).

The principle of fit is highly recognizable among “urban Appalachians,” or those who have migrated outside of the region. Studies show that urban Appalachians may maintain or even exaggerate their native dialects in order to maintain their identity as members of the non-dominant group. This was found to be the case even when using an Appalachian dialect could lead to negative stereotyping by members of more dominant groups (Jones, 2002). In a study of the urban Appalachian “East End” neighborhood in Cincinnati, anthropologist Rhoda Halperin identified how the collective identity and values of East Enders would trump other socio-economic factors. In fact, the more desperate the situational context, the more strongly urban Appalachians self-categorized as part of their non-dominant group. As quoted by Obermiller and Maloney (2002), Halperin described the reactions of East Enders—particularly within

educational or vocational contexts—when faced with the need of a community or family member:

Everyday practices—caring for children and the elderly, providing work, helping in times of crisis, granting favors, passing along information or lending support—represent the essence of East End life and culture. They are, however tenuously and fleetingly, embedded in specific East End structures that are old and enduring—the extended family, the church and neighborhood as a place that confers working class identity. The practices involved in maintaining those structures take priority over all others. *A real East Ender will take a lesser job, quit a job, or drop out of school* [emphasis added] before denying help or money to family or community members who need support. (p. 103)

By strongly identifying with a collective group identity, traditional cultural structures are maintained and perpetuated even among generations far removed from their Appalachian roots. These studies provide evidence for SIT in the process of Appalachian group differentiation and cultural identity, and may provide insights into the influence of culture on the work decisions of Appalachians both within and without their regional origins.

Subjective uncertainty reduction theory. Subjective uncertainty reduction theory (Hogg, 2001; Mullin & Hogg, 1999) proposes that people are motivated to self-categorize when they feel an uncomfortable degree of uncertainty regarding their personal beliefs, attitudes, feelings, and perceptions. They therefore may categorize themselves with a group that seems similar to their self-schema or personal identity. Several studies have provided support for the subjective uncertainty reduction theory (Grant & Hogg, 2012; Hogg & Grieve, 1999; Mullin & Hogg, 1999; Hogg, Sherman, Dierselhuis, Maitner, & Moffitt, 2007). In a recent experiment, Hogg et al. (2007) placed participants in groups using levels of self-conceptual uncertainty as the

independent variable in measuring degrees of group identification. They found that participants with higher degrees of uncertainty were more likely to define themselves as members of highly differentiated and cohesive groups (high “entitativity,” i.e., groups with well-defined boundaries, common goals, a common fate, internal homogeneity, and clear internal structure).

While this literature review did not reveal any studies applying subjective uncertainty reduction theory to Appalachian culture, the empirical support it has received in other settings provides fertile ground for future research. In the field of vocational psychology, personal uncertainties may contribute to higher affiliation with labor groups, or worker roles. However, this is highly speculative and would require further exploration.

Optimal distinctiveness theory. Optimal distinctiveness theory (ODT; Brewer, 1991, 1993) proposes that people build emotional attachment to social identities based on two motivations: either to assimilate with a group or to differentiate as an individual from others in the group. Brewer (1991) argued that a person will strongly identify with groups that best satisfy both of these motivations. One of the basic assumptions of ODT is that larger groups tend to offer greater opportunities for inclusiveness, and smaller groups offer greater opportunities for distinctiveness.

ODT has been supported in research on self-stereotyping. Pickett, Bonner, and Coleman (2002) studied the tendency to self-stereotype in three groups: honors students, Ohio State University students, and members of a sorority. In three studies, the authors found that members of each group tended to increase their levels of self-stereotyping when there was a perceived threat to a member’s intragroup standing and/or intergroup differentiation. Pickett and Brewer (2001) found similar results regarding perceived in-group/out-group homogeneity. When participants in both the assimilation and differentiation arousal conditions perceived a threat to

their intragroup assimilation and/or intergroup contrast, they expressed increased perceptions of in-group/out-group homogeneity (Pickett & Brewer, 2001). Thus, the need to assimilate combined with the need to differentiate may be a motivation for discriminating in-groups from out-groups, which inspires subsequent emotional attachments to in-group memberships.

Members of groups that are negatively stereotyped, such as Appalachians, may therefore increase their identification with in-group stereotypes when they perceive any threats to their needs for assimilation or differentiation. While ODT has not been investigated explicitly with this population, there is some evidence for the influence of self-stereotyping among Appalachian residents. Towers's (2005) study of "West Virginia's lost youth" examined the role of negative stereotypes in the residential preferences of the state's younger population. He reported that West Virginian youth are, "Made aware that they come from a 'landscape of exclusion' and that to remain in residence will reinforce their otherness," (p. 77). In other words, these students were aware that their Appalachian identity could threaten their ability to assimilate with the larger culture (an ODT principle). His survey of 689 students in several West Virginia counties identified 52 percent as "leavers" who did not want to live in West Virginia after completing their education (32% were "stayers" and 16% were "undecided"). In accordance with attribution theory, Towers (2005) found that "leavers" tended to attribute negative stereotypes to people's personal attributes, rather than to any socio-political landscape. To illustrate, he quoted several students both disputing and espousing Appalachian stereotypes about southern West Virginia counties:

"It is terribly poor and hillbillyish down there" – Brooke County student

"Uncivilized like, basic necessities . . . are non-existent (computers, TV)." – Brooke County student

“It has a reputation for being nothing but rednecks and welfare people.” – Huntington student

“Boone County is evil! . . . They are the epitome of WV stereotypes.” – Morgantown student

“The people, racism, no environmental policy, they give the state a bad name, not too bright.” – Morgantown student (p. 81)

Ultimately, Towers concluded that negative stereotypes influence out-migration from the state. Again, while this study did not explicitly use an ODT paradigm, it shows the power of identity threat in group differentiation. Given that the out-migration of the state’s youth has a tremendous impact on the region’s labor force and economy, ODT may provide interesting insights into the relationships between cultural identity and the vocational development of Appalachian workers.

Identity salience. Given the strong influence of both individual and group identities, it is important to address questions regarding the fluidity of identity salience, or why a person may act on his or her individual identity (e.g., I am a hard worker) versus his or her social identity (e.g., I am a West Virginian) (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Baumeister and Muraven (1996) stated that “individual identity is an adaptation to a social context,” (p. 405) and as such, people may choose to alter their identity to meet their perceived needs within a given framework. Contexts may therefore be understood on the macro level as tapestries of interwoven influences (e.g., socio-political contexts) and on the micro level as individual threads of specified cognitive and behavioral choices (e.g., vocational decision-making) that adapt to the broader contexts.

This choice of adaptation is fueled by one’s instincts for survival and moderated by one’s level of commitment to a social group. Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje (2002) stated that “the

relevant social context determines which categorization seems most suitable to provide a meaningful organization of social stimuli, and hence which identity aspects become salient as guidelines for the perceptions and behavior of those who operate within that context,” (p. 165). However, the authors also point out that the degree of commitment one has to the relevant social group may determine whether or not a person chooses to make her social identity the most salient.

Social identities include, but are not limited to, racial, ethnic, age, sexual, gender, (dis)ability, and class identities (Howard, 2000). Studies show that commitment to social identity can influence many key aspects of experience, such as life satisfaction (Logan, Ward, & Spitze, 1992), self-esteem (Phinney, 1991), and educational and vocational achievement (Oyserman, Grant, & Ager, 1995). As Fouad and Brown (2000) pointed out:

[cultural] contexts have shaped their behavior and have influenced their perceptions of themselves and of others, as well as others’ perceptions of them. Clients’ cultural contexts have also helped to form their perceptions of the problems they bring to counseling and the resources on which they may draw. (p. 380)

Perceptions of the self and others, and the perceptions that others have of one’s in-group may be based on stereotypes. Depending on one’s awareness of others’ perceptions of his or her in-group, a person’s commitment to a negatively stereotyped group may decrease or increase in a given social context.

Stereotypes. Research has shown that continuous exposure to, being evaluated in terms of, and occasionally behaving in a manner consistent with stereotypes may lead targets to incorporate stereotypic beliefs about their social groups into their own self-concept and subsequently, their behavioral choices (Lun, Sinclair, & Cogburn, 2009; Steele & Aronson,

1995). It is clear, therefore, that social contexts are influenced not only by how we see and interact with others, but also by how they see and interact with us. These interactions may therefore be guided by the stereotypes that either party may have about the other. Evidence abounds that exposure to constant assessment by self and others using a stereotyped evaluative rubric may lead targets to implicitly incorporate stereotyped social identities into their personal identity (Burkley & Blanton, 2009; Chung, Ehrhart, Holcombe Ehrhart, Hatstrup, & Solamon, 2010; Govorun & Payne, 2006; Lun, Sinclair, & Cogburn, 2009; Pickett, Bonner, & Coleman, 2002; Steele & Aronson, 1995).

People employ stereotypes for both cognitive and motivational reasons, but their use rarely results in accuracy (Uhlmann, Brescoll, & Machery, 2010). Research indicates that stereotypes simplify information processing on the part of the perceiver while justifying the status quo of the extant system (Hilton & von Hippel, 1996; Jost, Kivetz, Rubini, Guermendi, & Mosso, 2005). Stereotypes also provide a necessary social identity, which may result from contextual factors such as group conflicts or power hierarchies (Hilton & von Hippel, 1996). Stereotypes vary widely in both positive and negative directions, but the stereotype content model posits that all stereotypes vary along two valences: competence and warmth (Collange, Fiske & Sanitioso, 2009). This model stipulates that stereotypes along these two valences are based on envy or paternalism, the former inspiring feelings of jealousy, and the latter inspiring feelings of pity and sympathy. For example, in applying the Appalachian “hillbilly” stereotype to a coal miner, a worker might be viewed as low on competence (because those from Appalachia are regularly characterized as being less educated, gullible, and exploited) while high on warmth (because they are regularly characterized as being hard-working, religious, and family-oriented). This combination would result in feelings of paternalism, pity, or sympathy.

Studies (including this one) show that Appalachian people are highly aware of the stereotypes others apply to them, and that this awareness may influence their behaviors (Billings, Norman, & Ledford, 1999). This awareness may lead people from the region to internalize negative or positive attributes in a process known as self-stereotyping.

Self-stereotyping. Yung-Jui and Ying-yi (2010) defined self-stereotyping as the process that takes place when “people . . . systematically alter the perceptions of the characteristics and attributes of their self in a direction toward the perceived stereotypic ingroup characteristics and norms,” (p. 251). Traditionally, self-stereotyping has been characterized as a negative result of oppression; however, recent studies have examined the positive aspects of self-stereotyping, even when people identify with the negative characteristics of their in-group. Burkley and Blanton (2009) reported that internalizing in-group stereotypes can serve an epistemological purpose by providing a sense of control over one’s place in the world. They also argued that self-stereotyping provides ego protection for those with strong in-group associations because they can attribute personal short-comings to their negative group stereotypes (i.e. “I’m just an old redneck!”).

On the other hand, Jost et al. (2005) have argued that any stereotype, positive or negative, serves to maintain the unjust systems that exploit the less advantaged. They stated:

Complementary status stereotypes are especially effective system justification mechanisms because they allow people to justify inequality (i.e., ‘people deserve what they get and get what they deserve’) and at the same time to create a psychological sense of equality (e.g., ‘everyone gets his share’). (p. 310)

Jost et al. compared high- and low- status groups from around the world and found that positive and negative stereotypes maintain the legitimacy of the social system. Several Appalachian

scholars have made similar arguments regarding the utility of the “hillbilly” stereotype. There is evidence that hillbilly caricatures are used to promote the easy exploitation of regional resources, as well as to perpetuate a three-tiered class system (Blee & Billings, 1998; Donesky, 2002; Lewis, 2000; Wilson, 2000). Because of the broader historical and socio-political meanings of Appalachian stereotypes, it is important to examine their history and current applications.

Appalachian stereotypes. Stereotypes of mountain people are generally based on class prejudice and economic and social disparities, and thus cannot be viewed outside of the national sociopolitical system (Billings et al., 1999; Eller, 2008). Residents of Appalachia are often portrayed as, at best, ignorant and simple, or at worst, violent and sadistic (Andreescu & Shutt, 2009). Speer (2007) made the controversial statement that the treatment of the people of Appalachia in the media has been more negative than any other traditionally marginalized group, including “women, racial minorities, ethnic groups, low-income people, and groups challenging powerful interests,” (p. 114). He also noted that such portrayals are “fiction,” yet they have been accepted and even celebrated as accurate depictions of life in a historically depressed area. Perceptions of the region are deeply rooted in the economic history of not only the region, but the nation.

Originally defining themselves as “plain folk,” (Otto, 2007), the people of Appalachia first gained the interest of the nation in the 1870s when journalists reported on several violent family vendettas of the region (Blee & Billings, 1998). Missionaries, teachers, and academics soon followed reporters into the mountains and found societies what they categorized as part of a “retarded frontier” or “lost frontier” due to the traditional lifestyle typical of plain folk (Otto, 2007). The literary trend of “local color writing” in the late nineteenth century, particularly the writings of John Fox Jr., perpetuated the image of mountain people as a collection of “sight

gags” (Wilson, 2000, p. 99). Appalachian women were commonly portrayed as, “buxom, scantily dressed, mountain she-cat[s],” while their male counterparts were, “lazy, unkempt . . . clutching either a Revolutionary War-era firearm, a jug of moonshine, a flea-covered banjo,” (Wilson, 2000, p. 99). Such depictions of under-educated, over-sexed, primitive men and women established the caricature of the *hillbilly* as the lowest caste in white American society (Donesky, 2002; Otto, 2007; Wilson, 2000).

The hillbilly stereotype has since been widely used in popular culture (Billings et al., 2002; Otto, 2007; Speer, 2007), starting with news articles and fictional stories, then comic strips (e.g., “Li’l Abner” and “Snuffy Smith”), television shows (e.g., “The Beverly Hillbillies,” “Green Acres,” “The Andy Griffith Show,” and “Hee Haw”) and finally movies (e.g., “Deliverance”). Even today, the term “Appalachian” is commonly used to implicate incest, low-intelligence, and violence. For example, the critically acclaimed FX television show *Justified* followed several family crime syndicates in rural Appalachia; a recent episode of the television show *Modern Family* entitled “Aunt Mommy” referred to incest as “Appalachian” (Levitan, Lloyd, Higginbotham, O’Shannon, & Spiller, 2012); and stereotypes of the Appalachian region are actively discussed (and thankfully combated) in Suzanne Collins’ popular series of young adult novels *The Hunger Games* (2008). In a 2009 broadcast of *The O’Reilly Factor*, Fox News pundit Bill O’Reilly attacked Appalachia by bringing up old stereotypes of a “culture of poverty” and a “culture of ignorance.” He stated:

I submit to you that the culture in Appalachia harms the children almost beyond repair . . . There’s really nothing we can do about it. . . . their parents are screwed up. That’s the thing . . . Kids get married at 16 and 17. Their parents are drunks. I’m generalizing now. There’s a lot of meth. There’s a lot of irresponsibility. There’s fear to go. Look, if I’m

born in Appalachia, the first chance I get, I go to Miami. Because that's where the jobs are. But they stay there. . . . And I don't want to sound hopeless about it but I think it IS hopeless.

One might wonder about the possible political backlash if these statements had been made about any other oppressed group in America. Yet O'Reilly's attacks on Appalachian culture passed with relatively little comment from the country at large, and his statements provided further evidence of a view of the region that has been unchanged for over a century.

The hillbilly stereotype has remained relatively unchanged due to both external and internal factors. Internally, the stereotype of a primitive and undereducated Appalachian hillbilly was used to increase interest in the area's natural resources. As reported by a number of authors (Blee & Billings, 2002; Lewis, 2000; Wilson, 2000), stories and songs about hillbilly culture were cleverly used to market the area to prospective investors. Lewis (2000) stated that creators of such fictional caricatures "perpetrated and then perpetuated the myth of Appalachian otherness to facilitate absentee corporate hegemony by marginalizing indigenous residents economically and politically," (p. 22). Mountain people were portrayed as easy to manipulate, but eager to work. Blee and Billings (2002) quoted the writings of John Fox Jr. in describing Appalachian mountaineers:

[They are] proud, sensitive, kindly, obliging in an unreckoning way that is almost pathetic, honest, loyal, in spite of their common ignorance, poverty, and isolation . . . they are naturally capable, eager to learn, easy to uplift. (p. 121)

In this way, the land was portrayed as ready for the taking by absentee landlords, with an ignorant but eager labor force desperate for any kind of work (Shapiro, 1978; Williams, 2002).

This type of characterization was particularly popular as industrial interests in the area increased, and has been strongly linked to modern coal mining and extraction enterprises (Wilson, 1995).

External factors that have perpetuated the hillbilly stereotype include a national identity based on progress and reform. As the nation entered the 20th century, Americans experienced social pressures to modernize, which included calls to “civilize” primitive cultures both inside and outside of its borders. Otto (2007) characterized the reformation fervor that ultimately fueled the “hillbilly” stereotype:

Concern for ‘civilizing’ the primitive people of the world, however, was not confined to the areas outside the continental United States. American reformers soon turned their attention to the mountain folk of Appalachia, believing them to be as lost in ignorance and poverty as any foreign ‘people of color.’ After all, mountain folk feuded with their neighbors, believed in witches, raised broods of uneducated children and avoided hard work—except to raise corn for illegal moonshine whiskey. (p. 108)

By characterizing Appalachians as simple and uncivilized, Americans were consequently able to feel better about the rest of the nation as a whole (Donesky, 2002).

In discussing the persistence of Appalachian stereotypes, Eller (2008) wrote, “The idea of Appalachia as a place in, but not of, America continued because Americans needed to believe in Appalachia’s existence as part of the ongoing debate over national identity itself,” (p. 222).

Wilson (2002) further explained that the Appalachian stereotype provides a comforting affirmation of American social hierarchy:

Instantly recognizable caricatures for mass consumption, these hillbillies are thus assigned a totemic value—always lower in class or status—such that white Americans wanting desperately to believe in a three-class (or more) structure could breathe a sigh of

relief. “See,” they could say, “that’s the bottom for white folks and we’re not like that at all,” thus confirming their idealized middle-class self-positioning. (pp. 99-100)

Such stereotypes only served to confirm the supposed inferiority of people of the region, lending to their characterization as “others” in the American consciousness (Shapiro, 1978). The people of Appalachia thus became the default “out-group” of white America (Andreescu & Shutt, 2009).

The perceived “otherness” of Appalachia has only become more complex in modern America as many from the region migrate to outlying and urban areas (Obermiller & Howe, 2007). According to Obermiller and Howe (2007), there is evidence that emigration from the region may be due, in some part, to self-awareness of the negative stereotypes associated with the region (Christiadi, 2011; Towers, 2005). Those from Appalachia may learn to adapt their identity in order to meet the needs of a given situation, because they have learned to not only think of their own culture, but to think of their culture in terms of how it is viewed by others (Thomas & Schwarzbaum, 2006). Some, however, may cling more tightly to their regional cultural identity by protecting, even exaggerating, cultural markers that may invite negative stereotypes (Jones, 2002).

Appalachian scholarship thus confirms much of the stereotype literature of social psychology, yet the influence of group identity, differentiation, and stereotyping has yet to be explicitly investigated. The field of counseling psychology has only recently started to explore the influence of culture on the vocational behaviors of the 25 million Appalachians living within the region (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2011a). This may be due, in part, to the cultural limitations of traditional vocational theory, including a historical lack of research on blue-collar

workers. As the influence of multicultural constructs has spread throughout the field, vocational psychologists have started to examine the cultural responsiveness of dominant career theories.

Multiculturalism in Vocational Psychology

Historically, traditional models of vocational psychology have assumed a target audience of European-American, middle-class workers with individualistic values and access to educational and economic resources (Fouad, 2002; Healy, 1990; Smith, 1983). Field historians have noted that this focus grew from the Industrial Revolution and a spirit of reform in the United States, which paralleled the early development of vocational psychology (Aubrey, 1977; Gysbers, Heppner, & Johnston, 2003). An assumption of a male, European-American worldview was foundational to all aspects of career theory, leading to a body of empirical research with limited cultural responsiveness.

Traditional career constructs tend to approach all clients from an individualistic paradigm which may not apply to non-majority groups. Gysbers et al. (2003) noted “five key tenets” that arose from the birth of career theory that have influenced the field for decades, including “(a) individualism and autonomy, (b) affluence, (c) structure of opportunity open to all, (d) the centrality of work in people’s lives, and (e) the linearity, progressiveness, and rationality of the career development process,” (p. 53). Each of these tenets reflects the values of dominant white Euro-American culture. Assumptions of individualism, structured opportunity, and a linear career path have led researchers to examine careers within a framework of apparently stable occupational structures that a worker may choose to inhabit (Cohen, Duberly, & Mallon, 2004; Collin & Young, 2000; Richardson, 1993). Such examinations tend to generate research questions from an intrapsychic paradigm, which focuses on the influence of individual characteristics and static, internalized categories rather than the dynamic relationships between

people and their cultural environment (Healy, 1990; Schultheiss, 2007; Watts, Super, & Kidd, 1981). These questions come together to form the “grand career narrative” of Western traditions (Blustein, 2006), which articulates career choice as an implementation of the self-concept or of one’s identity (e.g., Holland, 1997; Super, 1953). However, more recent iterations of career theory have recognized the limited scope of such a narrative, and its exclusion of those with limited access to vocational and educational resources.

Modern and post-modern vocational psychologists have explored how self-concept implementation relates to workers who may not have access to broad career choices (Blustein, 2006), and a number of theorists have begun to look at the reciprocal influence between identity and career development within more inclusive paradigms. Several authors (Carter & Swanson, 1990; Fouad, 1993; Herr, 1996; Subich, 1996) have pointed out that the majority of vocational instruments were originally normed on white, college-educated, middle-class samples. Subich (1996) also noted that traditional career theories fail to acknowledge the presence of environmental and psychological barriers that may be faced by clients outside of the dominant culture. For example, clients may dismiss a career path due to racial, ethnic, gender, or geographic barriers, even though they may have the necessary interests, aptitudes and skills (Constantine, Wallace, & Kindaichi, 2005; Flores & O’Brien, 2002; Fouad & Smith, 1996; Gushue, et al., 2006; McWhirter, 1997; Wettersten et al., 2005). As calls for multicultural perspectives increased within the field of vocational psychology, many researchers focused on testing the cultural validity of traditional career constructs and offered suggestions for applying them within a multicultural context (Arbona, 1995; Betz & Fitzgerald, 1993; Richardson, 1993). A brief examination of influential career development theories provides a background for their multicultural applications in modern and post-modern vocational psychology.

Career development theories. Trait and factor, social learning, and developmental theories have dominated the field of career psychology and heavily influenced modern theories and interventions in occupational development (Brown & Lent, 2005). These theories are founded upon the world-views of individuals with a high degree of volition in their choice of occupation (Savickas, 2000; Savickas & Lent, 1994). Though this may limit the cultural responsiveness of these theories, they still define constructs and processes that have been influential even in postmodern vocational theories. However, a major difference between traditional and postmodern approaches is that traditional theories view career as a linear, progressive sequence of jobs throughout the lifespan (Gysbers et al., 2003). Postmodern theories, such as Blustein's psychology of work, conceptualize career as a system of meaning influenced by an individual's cultural context (Blustein, 2006; Blustein, Palladino, Schultheiss, & Flum, 2004). Thus, postmodern career constructs are regarded from a broader perspective of meaning-making, which expands upon aspects of traditional career theories such as the influence of early relationships and environmental needs (trait and factor or person-environment fit theories); the interaction among psychological processes, behaviors, and the environment (social learning theories); and identity implementation (developmental theories).

Trait and factor or person-environment fit theories. Based on the work of Frank Parsons (1909), trait and factor theories, or person-environment fit theories, conceptualize career choices as efforts to fit the needs of a worker with the needs of the employer. People are motivated to seek out work settings that complement their skills, values, abilities, and interests (Dawis, 2002; Holland, 1997). Though person-environment fit theories have evolved in many ways, they all rest on the basic assumption that matching worker characteristics to worker environment creates a meaningful work-life (Dawis, 1996). Of similar import is the assumption

that people will be more engaged in their educational pursuits if they have vocational aspirations that support their interests and values (Blustein, Juntunen, & Worthington, 2000). James and Gilliland (2002) noted that, “most school, vocational, and rehabilitation counselors practice a trait-factor approach in some form or the other,” (p. 3). They also noted that many of the tests and assessments used in traditional career counseling have evolved from the trait-factor theories.

Holland’s Vocational Personalities and Work Environments. The most influential trait and factor theorist was John Holland, who conceptualized careers as an expression of personality. His theory of Vocational Personalities and Work Environments (1959, 1968, 1996, 1997) has become the most empirically supported career theory in the field (Brown & Lent, 2005). Holland’s theory delineates six types of worker personalities: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional. He contended that every personality is differentiated through the ordinal arrangement of each of these types (for example, a person may be Social, Artistic, and Investigative—SAI—indicating that the individual’s personality is dominated by these three traits in descending order). Work environments are also characterized by their resemblance to and support of these types. The primary relational focus within this theory is between a person (with his or her traits, life goals, values, and aptitudes) and the career environment (Gysbers et al., 2003).

The self and identity play important roles in person-environment fit theories. As defined by Holland, Diager, and Power (1980), vocational identity is “the possession of a clear and stable picture of one’s goals, interests, personality, and talents,” (p. 1). Holland adopted some aspects of Erikson’s (1968) identity construct, which referred to a sense of coherence and continuity in a person’s set of values, belief systems, goals, and attitudes (Blustein & Noumair, 1996). It is

important to note, however, that Holland incorporated these constructs into the definition of both personal identity and the identities of work environments (Holland, 1996).

As a major component of Holland's theory of Vocational Personalities and Work Environments (1959, 1968, 1996, 1997) vocational identity has received significant attention. Much of the empirical support for his conceptualization is based on the vocational identity subtest of Holland et al.'s (1980) "My Vocational Situation" assessment (Diemer & Blustein, 2007; Gushue, Scanlan, Pantzer, & Clarke, 2006; Leong & Morris, 1989; Lopez, 1989). While Holland's theory continues to be highly influential, vocational identity has been operationalized more broadly in other areas of career theory, particularly the developmental approaches. In spite of this, Holland (1996) contended that his theory maintained its dominant position by focusing on the issues most relevant to clients: identifying what jobs will make clients happy and what jobs clients will perform well.

Personality Development Theory. The appellation of Ann Roe's Personality Development Theory (1956; 1990) belies an influential trait and factor theory, rather than a developmental approach. Drawing from Maslow's concept of a needs hierarchy (1943), Roe created a "needs approach" that focused on early family relationships, particularly that between parent and child, and how they influenced career choice. Roe hypothesized that interests, values, and needs contribute to the process of selecting an occupation within a framework of early childhood relationships, environmental experiences, and genetic features. Roe's approach has been criticized as being biased towards individualism and has obtained fragile empirical support, yet her emphasis on the developmental impact of early need fulfillment on careers remains conceptually significant (Gysbers et al., 2003).

Theory of Work Adjustment. The Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA; Dawis & Lofquist, 1984) has become one of the more dominant person-environment fit theories in recent decades (Gysbers et al., 2003). Work adjustment is achieved by maintaining corresponding levels of need fulfillment between the worker and the work environment. In other words, higher levels of satisfaction result when the level of skills a worker brings to the task corresponds with the level of compensation the worker receives in exchange (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Gysbers et al., 2003). Such compensation goes beyond a paycheck, and may involve feelings of safety, appreciation, sociability, or stability.

In discussing the theory's conceptualization of needs, Dawis (2002) referred to underlying physiological and/or psychological attributes that may either detract from or promote an individual's well-being. In fact, Dawis and Lofquist's construct of identity is defined by an individual's perception of these physiological or psychological attributes. As quoted by Blustein and Noumair (1996), Dawis and Lofquist (1991) described the self-image as corresponding to,

the individual's perception of his or her personality, that is, of his or her psychological needs and values and of abilities for satisfying those needs and values in interactions with the main general environments (e.g., work, social, educational, family) that life presents.

(p. 434)

As with other person-environment fit theories, the relational focus is between the individual and the demands of his or her environment. Yet these theories have traditionally ignored the cultural contexts within which people's personalities, needs, and values may evolve while focusing on individual, rather than group or collective, identities. Nevertheless, trait and factor theories continue to be highly influential among American researchers in spite of (or perhaps because of) their emphasis on people with a high degree of occupational volition (Savickas, 2000).

Social learning theories. Career theories based on Bandura's (1977, 1982, 1986) social learning theory have gained significant empirical support, most notably with diverse populations including people from Appalachia. Bandura hypothesized that people learn through observing others' attitudes, behaviors, and the consequences of their behaviors. This interaction among psychological processes, behaviors, and the environment creates a "reciprocal determinism" through which people's behaviors influence the environment and vice versa.

Social learning theory of career decision making. Krumboltz (1994) drew from Bandura's (1977) social learning theory in order to understand not only what influences people to pursue certain lines of work, but also what may impede their ability to make and implement choices. The theory is based on a triadic reciprocal interaction system, which is to say that decisions are made within a symbiotic framework of environment, personal factors, and behaviors (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1990). He identified four factors that influence career decision-making: genetic endowment and special abilities, environmental conditions and events, learning experiences, and task-approach skills (Krumboltz, 1994; Krumboltz, Mitchell, & Gelatt, 1975). Krumboltz described three important learning behaviors based on Bandura's (1977) original identification of learning types: instrumental learning experiences (when a certain behavior leads to a positive outcome), associative learning (when a neutral stimulus becomes linked to an emotionally-laden stimulus), and vicarious learning (when one learns through observation of others). All of these factors and learning experiences combine to create a person's beliefs about his or her reality, generating both self-views and world-views which are then related to career expectations, career task approaches, and career satisfaction (Krumboltz & Baker, 1973; Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1990).

Social Cognitive Career Theory. Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994) proposes that individual and contextual factors influence self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals to create interests, actions, and performance (Gysbers et al., 2003). Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994) extended Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory to outline several processes: 1) the development of educational and career interests, 2) the promotion of career-relevant choices through the mechanisms of interests and other socio-cognitive mechanisms, and 3) attainment of different levels of career performance and perseverance. The socio-cognitive mechanisms that people use in order to make career decisions are self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and goal representations. Children and adolescents thus develop skills, set performance standards, and develop levels of confidence in their ability to accomplish different tasks through repeated experience, observation, modeling, and feedback from important others (Ali & McWhirter, 2006). These factors also influence expectations about future career performance outcomes. In addition, Lent et al., (1994) expanded Betz and Hackett's (1981) self-efficacy approach by exploring how the modification of faulty self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations might open up options upon which individuals may have previously foreclosed. Blustein (2006) noted that SCCT explores the motivational dimensions of vocational behavior, highlighting how contextual influences may impede or enable one's ability to find work that emphasizes personal interests, skills, and values.

Subich (1996) noted that SCCT's emphasis on both individual and contextual factors is particularly valuable in the study of underserved populations. In fact, the theory has proven effective for career research with several minority groups, including Hispanics (Flores & O'Brien, 2002), Asian Americans (Tang, 1996; Tang, Fouad, & Smith, 1999), battered women (Chronister & McWhirter, 2003, 2004), women (Hackett & Betz, 1981), African Americans

(Gainor & Lent, 1998), and American Indians, (Lauver & Jones, 1991). As previously discussed, SCCT has also been used in studying the educational and career choices of high school students in Appalachia (Ali & McWhirter, 2006; Ali & Saunders, 2006; Ali & Saunders, 2009; Russ, 2006; Tang & Russ, 2007).

Developmental theories. Developmental career theories conceptualize career as a process, rather than an event. They have typically explored work roles in relation to other life roles. Modern adaptations of developmental theory have examined occupational roles in a relational context, exploring how work can confer social identity (Savickas, 2000).

Super's life-span, life-space theory. Super (1942, 1953; Super et al., 1992; Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996) viewed career through the lens of individual development throughout the life cycle (Gelso & Fretz, 1992). He has been credited as the first to examine the relationship between self-concept and career development (Gysbers et al., 2003). Super theorized that an individual's "vocational self-concept" is shaped through its dynamic interaction with each phase of life, or "maxicycle" (Super, 1953, 1996). Consequently, as a person develops there is a "synthesis and compromise between individual and social factors and work and life satisfactions," (Gysbers et al., 2003, p. 23). Thus a career is formed as the person, with his or her self-concept, completes developmental tasks within a societal context (e.g., economic, community, school, family). While such a synthesis creates opportunities to explore the influence of cultural variables on career development, examinations of Super's theories with diverse populations are a relatively recent phenomenon (Fouad & Arbona, 1994).

In both his early and his more recent writings, Super theorized about the possible influence of a number of individual and social factors (e.g., race, ethnicity, the labor market) on career development processes (Super, 1953, 1990). He paid more specific attention, however, to

the ways that socio-economic status can condition occupation-related processes by providing or limiting opportunities and by molding occupational concepts and self-concepts. Empirical investigations, however, provided limited insights into the specific aspects of SES that may impact career processes (Fouad & Arbona, 1994). For example, a study by Dillard and Perrin (1980) indicated that among Black, Hispanic (Puerto Rican), and White adolescents, there was a positive but small influence of SES on career maturity (5% of variance), career aspirations (3.3% of variance), and career expectations (3.2% of variance). However, more recent research has indicated that SES contributes significantly to other areas of career development, particularly as related to identity (Liu & Ali, 2005).

Circumscription and compromise. Gottfredson (1981, 1996, 2005) also examined the importance of SES and self-concept in her developmental theory. Her theory of circumscription and compromise examines the development of attraction between people and occupations within individual frameworks of intellectual level and socio-economic status. Gottfredson (1981) hypothesized that career choice is a process of eliminating and narrowing one's choices based on the perceived accessibility of an occupation. This accessibility is generated from the self-concept, the cognitive schema whereby one decides which career options have an "appropriate" level of prestige as related to one's social or class status, or as being "appropriate" for his or her gender. Gottfredson (1981) termed these perceptions the "social space," or the views individuals have of where they fit or would want to fit into society. These views are influenced by the images people have of different occupations, or the stereotypes they have for a particular set of work or workers. These occupational stereotypes detail characteristics or personalities of people viewed as appropriate for different occupations (e.g., a coal miner is a strong man; a kindergarten teacher is a kind woman). As people consider their occupational choices, their implicit use of

work stereotypes initiates circumspection, or the process by which people narrow their options based on their social space. They then compromise by adjusting their aspirations to accommodate their perceived external reality (Gottfredson, 1996, 2005).

Early in her career, Gottfredson was called upon to defend her prominent use of the self-concept in her theory of circumscription and compromise. Questions were raised regarding the utility of self-concept as an explanatory construct, because it reflects a person's relation to the world rather than any inherent motivation. Gottfredson (1985) responded by identifying how a focus on relatedness is a theoretical strength:

it should be noted that the self-concept is also a reflection, albeit a distorted one, of people's more inherent properties (e.g., personality, physique). . . . People's self-concepts are not only their views of themselves but also their views of themselves in society . . . (p. 160)

In this way, Gottfredson defended the study of the self-concept and identity in understanding vocational development within individual and social contexts.

Developmental theories and vocational identity. Both Gottfredson (1985, 2005) and Super (1957) recognized the significant impact of a multi-dimensional self-concept on vocational development. It is therefore no surprise that some of the most comprehensive definitions of the self-concept as a vocational construct have come from developmental theory (Blustein & Noumair, 1996). In this study's exploration of the interactions between cultural identity and vocational choice, it is necessary to understand both the construct of vocational identity and its application within multicultural contexts.

Vocational identity and ego development. Erikson (1968) cited the establishment of a vocational identity as one of the most important tasks of psychosocial development: "In general,

it is the inability to settle on an occupational identity which disturbs most young people,” (Erikson, 1968, p. 135). During adolescence and early adulthood, young people find new applications for their increased cognitive and physical abilities, as well as their increased independence and autonomy. These explorations lead to decisions about personal beliefs, ideologies, and relationships, as well as discoveries of ways to contribute to society and express one’s self-concept in the vocational environment (Hoare, 2002; Sokol, 2009; Vondracek, 1992). As both the purported genesis and mechanism of self-actualization (Vondracek, 1995), vocational identity qualifies as one of the most important of many identity domains, along with ideological, religious, and class identities (Skorikov & Vondracek, 1998; Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996; Vondracek, 1995). Marcia’s (1966) identity formation model has been instrumental in operationalizing vocational identity development (Blustein, Devenis, & Kidney, 1989; Blustein & Phillips, 1990; Phinney, 1992; Hirschi, 2011; Savickas, 1985).

Marcia’s model (1966) describes two major components of identity: crisis and commitment. *Crisis* indicates periods of identity instability surrounding processes of exploration. In the context of ego identity development, *exploration* entails the consideration of alternatives in the ideological and interpersonal domains. This exploration is especially intense during times of crisis, or questioning of the identity, which are common during adolescence and young adulthood (Erikson, 1968). Ideally, crisis leads to further exploration and ultimately identity *commitment*, or a stable self-definition in philosophical, religious, political, interpersonal, and vocational domains (Grotevant & Adams, 1984; Waterman, 1985).

The interactions among exploration, crisis, and commitment lead to four identity statuses: identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, identity moratorium, and identity achievement (Marcia, 1966). *Diffusion* generally indicates a period of identity indifference, devoid of either crisis or

commitment (Marcia, Waterman, Matteson, Archer, & Orlofsky, 1993; Skorikov & Vondracek, 1998). *Foreclosure* is a type of commitment, but it implies a commitment made without necessary exploration. Such exploration is often prematurely terminated due to the uncritical acceptance of the attitudes, roles, and values of parental figures (Blustein et al., 1989; Marcia, 1966). *Moratorium* indicates an active period of exploration and vague commitments (Marcia et al., 1993). Finally, *achievement* implies that a commitment has been made following a period of exploration. Such a commitment is regarded as relatively fluid, because, as stated by Kroger, Martinussen, and Marcia (2010), “naturally occurring life-cycle events will disequilibrate [*sic*] this identity configuration and result in an identity re-formation process,” (p. 684). Thus, identity formation is not a single process, but the culmination of several processes that ebb and flow across the lifespan.

A recent meta-analysis by Kroger et al. (2010) examined a number of studies on identity development in adolescents and young adults. They found that while studies employing continuous measures showed small increases in moratorium and achievement scores over time, cross-sectional categorical assessments of identity status change showed that relatively large mean proportions of individuals had not attained identity achievement by young adulthood. Roughly 1/3 (.34) of participants had an identity achieved status by age 22, and just under half (.47) of participants were identity achieved by age 36. These results indicated that it is common for people to progress and regress in their identity development even after early adulthood, when many individuals continue to explore vocational identity alternatives (Kroger et al., 2010). Therefore, it would be dangerous to assume that studies of identity development, including the development of a vocational identity, cease to be relevant in middle or even late adulthood.

A number of theorists have adapted existing identity constructs to the development of a vocational identity. Skorikov and Vondracek (1998) combined Marcia's (1966) model with Grotevant's (1987) model of sequential resolution of identity crises across identity domains. In a study of 1,099 high school students in grades seven through twelve, the authors found that vocational identity was positively correlated to overall identity, which confirmed results from previous investigations (e.g., Kroger, 1988). However, Skoricov and Vondracek (1998) found that advancement in vocational identity statuses occurred independently of identity development in other domains. Their results supported the use of the progressive developmental model of vocational identity.

Other theorists have emphasized the relationship between identity development and vocational identity achievement in life and career satisfaction. Hall (2002) noted the importance of a strong identity in mediating self-directed, values-driven career development within unstable occupational contexts. Fugate, Kinicki, and Ashforth (2004) found that career identity is one of three personal dimensions that promote employability (along with personal adaptability and social/human capital). Even more recently, Hirschi (2011) examined the role of vocational identity as a mediator between self-evaluations and life satisfaction, with mixed results. In her study of Swiss adolescents the author found that core self-evaluations predicted life satisfaction and vocational identity achievement. She also found that while vocational identity achievement predicted life satisfaction, there was not significant evidence that it mediated the effects of core self-evaluations. Parallel developmental statuses of ego and vocational identity have therefore been shown to influence career development and career success; however the mechanism of this influence remains unclear.

While traditional theories of career development assumed a stable environment in which to achieve and maintain a closed vocational identity, the current socio-economic climate requires many workers to explore options and make career decisions throughout their lives (Heppner, Fuller, & Multon, 1998; Herr, 1990, 1996; Leong & Hartung, 2000). Blustein and Noumair (1996) summed up the current relationship between identity and vocational development:

Thus we are currently witnessing parallel changes in the volatile economic milieu and in the increasingly context-based conceptualizations of the self and identity. These changes are fostering a view of the self and identity that is far more relativistic and culturally bound when compared with the existing constructs in career development. Consequently, as individuals seek ways to learn about themselves and maintain a degree of inner cohesion, they are also becoming aware that an exploratory and open attitude to their increasingly diverse experiences is needed to adapt to changing circumstances. (p. 437)

There have been repeated calls for increased investigation into the potential links among identity development and career assessment, research, and counseling (Blustein & Noumair, 1996; Raskin, 1994; Vondracek, 1992). However, the growth in the number of empirical investigations into vocational identity development remains relatively sluggish, particularly in relation to multicultural identity, including racial/ethnic identity, sexual identity, and class or status identity (Blustein, 2006; Porfeli, Lee, Vondracek, & Weigold, 2011; Thompson & Subich, 2011). While still overwhelmingly under-represented in the research (Flores & O'Brien, 2002; Kenny, Blustein, Chaves, Grossman, & Gallagher, 2003), an examination of the literature exploring multicultural aspects of vocational identity provides possible insights into the vocational development of other cultures, including the Appalachian culture.

Racial/ethnic identity and vocational identity. Ethnic identity has been described as “a multidimensional construct that includes feelings of ethnic belonging and pride, a secure sense of group membership, and positive attitudes toward one’s ethnic group,” (Phinney & Alipuria, 1996, p. 142). Researchers have suggested that ethnic identity may be an essential component of vocational identity for people of color during their adolescence (Arbona, 1995, 1996; Fouad & Arbona, 1994). The majority of studies in this field have examined students who identify as Black/African Americans and have tended to focus on the influence of Black racial identity (BRI; Cross, 1971, 1994; Helms, 1990; Helms & Piper, 1994) on career development. Research has indicated strong correlations between racial and ethnic identities and vocational development. For example, studies have shown that higher conformity attitudes (to the majority/White culture) are related to vocational identity foreclosure for Black women as well as to expectations of high positive returns from personal investments in education and career (Byars-Winston, 2006; Manese & Fretz, 1984). Other results have indicated that internalization of BRI are associated with positive vocational attitudes for Black women (Manese & Fretz, 1984), and that cognitive styles that are similar to majority culture may predict lower levels of vocational identity foreclosure (Thompson, 1989). In addition, Jackson and Neville (1998) found that among African American college students attending a predominantly White university, internalization of one’s racial identity accounted for a significant amount of vocational identity variance for women. Interestingly, many of these results did not apply to Black men.

While evidence appears to support a relationship between racial/ethnic identity and vocational identity across cultures, the nature of this relationship has yet to be adequately explored and directions of causality and applicability remain unclear. Nevertheless, while at

least one study found that racial identity attitudes were not associated with career aspirations for men or women (Evans & Herr, 1994), the majority of the empirical evidence in this burgeoning field appears to support a link between cultural identities and vocational identity (see Byars-Winston, 2010, for a review).

Sexual identity and vocational identity. Researchers have also begun to investigate vocational identity as influenced by non-heteronormative sexual identities. Lidderdale, Croteau, Anderson, Tovar-Murray, and Davis (2007) described the need of many lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals to manage their sexual identity in the career domain, and several researchers have started to examine the interactions between sexual and work identities. Schmidt and Nillson (2006) found that inner sexual identity conflict was a statistically significant contributor to variance in both vocational indecision and career maturity among 102 self-identified LGB youth. A qualitative study by House (2004) confirmed that, among a group of self-identified lesbians, “in every stage of career development, sexual orientation interacted with career development” (p. 253), indicating the need for the integration of sexual orientation as a variable in vocational counseling, particularly with the use of Super’s life-span, life-space perspective. House noted that issues of identity were present even in the primary stages of career exploration, where participants asked themselves questions such as, “In what career can I be myself?” (p. 253). Fisher, Gushue, and Cerrone (2011) found that the level of negative sexual identity among participants influenced the relationship between family career support and career aspirations. In turn, family career support was positively related to career aspirations, as was being in a committed relationship. Overall, empirical evidence again supports a relationship between cultural/sexual identity and vocational identity, though, as with racial/ethnic identities, the nature of this relationship requires further scrutiny.

Class/social status identity and career development. When considering which aspects of culture correspond most significantly with individual behaviors, social class has been shown to be a more powerful predictor of worldview than family structure, race, religion, national origin, income, or subjective class identification (Kohn, 1977; Kohn, et al., 1983; Spenner, 1988). Yet the role of social class on individual behaviors remains a relatively small area of research in psychology (Blustein, 2006; Fouad & Brown, 2000). This may be due, in part, to the explicit and implicit taboos in American society against discussing social class (Wysong & Perrucci, 2007). While there have been repeated calls for more research on the role of social status in career development, this area remains relatively untouched in the field of vocational psychology particularly among the “lower” classes (APA, 2006; Blustein et al., 2002; Brown, Fukunaga, Umemoto, & Wicker, 1996; Fouad & Brown, 2000; Liu & Ali, 2005; Subich, 2001).

Researchers tend to broadly define social class in terms of one’s *access to resources*, as operationalized through educational attainment, income, or occupational prestige (APA, 2006; Brown, Fukunaga, Umemoto, & Wicker, 1996; Rossides, 1997). Such markers have traditionally been measured by “prestige scores” (e.g., The Socioeconomic Index of Occupations, Nakao et al., 2002; The Registrar General’s Scale, Stevenson, 1928; The Hollingshead Index of Social Position, Duncan, 1961) or statistical equations that combine income, education, and occupation. However, such scores tend to ignore the implications of SES on the lives of the people they describe, and the APA’s Task Force on Socioeconomic Status (2006) observed that such measurements are not interchangeable and tend to reflect the goals of their creators. Traditional measurements of status ignore its relational component, which “reflects one’s relation to levels and types of economic resources, in addition to social valuation and access to societal control and influence,” (Fouad & Brown, 2000; p. 382).

As the gap between the rich and poor in the United States continues to widen (Johnston, 2007; Economist, 2006), the markers that operationalize socio-economic status become simultaneously more obvious and more complex, making the relational aspects of status increasingly important to the psychology of work (Blustein, 2006). To illustrate, the APA's Task Force on Socioeconomic Status (2006) surmised that SES has a direct impact on psychological well-being, and echoed the voices of other psychologists regarding the need to investigate "the impact of socioeconomic position on psychological processes and outcomes, the subjective experiences of social class status, and psychosocial process related to the social and political implications of class inequities," (p. 1). Specifically, the task force highlighted three life domains in which SES may have particular influence: health, education, and human welfare. Each of these domains relates with multiple factors on spectrums of "privilege, power, and access to resources," (p. 4).

SES and physical and mental health. While empirical studies of vocational identity and social status identity continue to be relatively rare, there is a much larger body of research on the effects of socio-economic class on health, both physical and mental, which may influence one's access to the opportunity structure (Blustein, 2006; Matthews, Gallo, & Taylor, 2010). Early studies in health psychology revealed a concomitant increase in participant mortality rates with any downgrade in occupational status (Marmot, Shipley, & Rose, 1984). In response, the APA Task Force (2006) identified four areas of study that have focused on the association between SES and health: differential access to health care, differential exposure to environmental hazards (e.g., toxins, pathogens, carcinogens), differential behaviors and lifestyles (e.g., smoking, poor diet, lack of exercise), and differential exposure to stress. Studies of the latter two pathways, in particular, have shown relationships between environmental determinants or "area" (e.g., access

to playgrounds and healthy food options) and health behaviors (Macintyre, Maciver, & Soomam, 1993). Others have examined the relationship between “allostatic load” or the body’s efforts to create stability through change, and how the physiological effects of stress on the body increase rates of morbidity and mortality (McEwen, 1998, 2008; Lachman & Weaver, 1998; Seeman et al., 2004). The pathway linking stress to physiological detriments has become the “leading candidate” in the study of such mechanisms (Matthews, et al., 2010). In spite of some evidence to the contrary (Matthews, et al., 2010), a person’s SES remains “one of the most enduring of all risk factors,” (Seeman et al., 2004, p. 1985) in examinations of physical and mental health.

Research on SES has provided convincing evidence of the links between class and mental health. Studies indicate that threatening or tense environments, which may be common among communities linked to lower economic incomes, may lead to feelings of hopelessness, hostility, anger, and depression (Gallo & Matthews, 2003), as well as chronic vigilance and negative attributions (Chen & Matthews, 2003). Such negative affect may increase conflict and exacerbate physiological symptoms (Chen & Matthews, 2003). Multiple studies have pointed to the correlation between persons of lower SES and elevated rates of depression (Cutrona et al., 2005; Hobfoll, Johnson, Ennis, & Jackson, 2003; Mossakowski, 2008; Zimmerman & Katon, 2005). Mossakowski’s (2008) longitudinal study of young adults of varying ethnic and racial backgrounds indicated that, in contradiction to traditional measures of SES, occupational prestige was only weakly linked to depressive symptoms; however, the *duration* of poverty over the 13-year study was strongly correlated with mental health issues. In addition, studies have shown a prevalence of depression, introversion, loneliness, and interpersonal sensitivity among people in poorer areas of Appalachia (Keefe, Hastrup, & Thomas, 2005). A recent study by Roy-Byrne, Joesch, Wang, and Kessler (2009), showed that the SES of participants did not

influence their access of mental health services; in fact, those from lower SES backgrounds may be over-represented. However, results indicated that those with lower status had poorer treatment outcomes for depression and anxiety. This leads to further questions about the impact of SES on mental health, and the efficacy of current evaluation and treatment in areas that are dominated by high levels of poverty, including parts of the Appalachian region (Keefe, Hastrup, & Thomas, 2005).

SES and education. SES also influences educational aspirations, which correlate strongly with vocational achievement and occupational choice. Notably, lower SES has been linked to diminished academic achievement, particularly among students raised in an impoverished learning environment (Hochschild, 2003). Hanson's (1994) study used data collected by the National Center for Education Statistics on 28,000 high school seniors from 1980-1986. Her results indicated that "SES is one of the largest sources of lost talent," (p. 171). She found that over twice as many participants from lower SES backgrounds had educational expectations that did not meet their aspirational education goals (25% versus 12%). She also found that these same youths were significantly more likely to experience both reduced and unrealized educational expectations. King (1996) highlighted the fact that students from homes with an income of less than \$20,000 made up only 15% of high school seniors who took the SAT in 1995, and of that 15%, only 66% stated that they had plans to attend a four-year college or university (compared to the 80 – 85% of seniors from middle- and high-income families). Several other studies have verified that family income is a major factor in the decision to attend college (e.g., Stage & Hossler, 1988; Yowell, 2000), and that students with limited family financial resources may choose not to pursue a traditional path towards higher education after graduating from high school. The influence of family finances may be surpassed, however, by

the educational expectations established within families (Hanson, 1994; Sewell & Shah, 1968).

Hanson's (1994) study found that young people from families with limited access to socioeconomic resources were less likely to obtain high educational goals. However, even when differences in access to resources were taken into account, these students had lower educational expectations, even if they had high educational aspirations.

A significant amount of attention has also been paid to the role of social class background in studies of college students (e.g., Aries & Seider, 2007; Balz & Estin, 1998; Bufton, 2003; Cohen, 1998; Darling, Molina, Sanders, Lee, & Zhao, 2008; Ostrove & Long, 2007; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Reay, David, & Ball, 2005; Walpole, 2003, 2008). A majority of these studies have focused on students in the high middle and upper classes, who generally represent the bulk of university students. Of the studies conducted on students from lower SES backgrounds, there seems to be a general feeling among participants that, "University is not for the likes of us," (Bufton, 2003; p. 207). These students often report struggling to feel that they "belong" in university settings at both the undergraduate and graduate levels (Ostrove, Stewart, & Curtin, 2011). As quoted by Ostrove et al., (2011), a participant in Kadi's (1993) research on social class and academia noted:

Universities are designed to make working-class people feel like we don't belong.

Because we don't. . . . Universities are established to keep people like me out, and to keep middle- and upper-class people in. If working-class people suddenly began earning university degrees in larger numbers, who would work the lines, scrub the toilets, descend into the mines? (p. 752)

Studies indicate that SES may continue to affect students even after graduation from high school or college. Seeman, et al., (2004) found that participants who had not completed high

school experienced 25% mortality, as compared to those who completed high school or more, who had an 18% mortality rate. In addition, Walpole (2008) found that Black students from low SES backgrounds reported lower incomes, lower rates of degree attainment, and lower aspirations than their higher SES counterparts nine years after graduation. Such studies indicate the extreme difficulty with which students from low SES backgrounds are able to move into higher status brackets, because they arrive at college with some significant economic and familial stressors. As stated by Blankenship (1998), it is important to recognize that “both the likelihood that someone will face a challenge and their ability to thrive in the face of that challenge are determined largely by their location in the social hierarchy,” (p. 393).

SES and career development. One’s location within the social hierarchy is often marked by access not only to education, but to career opportunities as well (APA, 2006). SES has been linked to a number of vocational constructs, most notably to one’s access to resources that facilitate or obstruct career development (Brown et al., 1996; Diemer & Ali, 2009; Sewell & Hauser, 1975). Barriers to these resources vary from the immediate, such as a lack of access to unbiased vocational guidance (Mestre & Robinson, 1983; Blustein, Juntunen, & Worthington, 2000), to the broadly structural, such as labor market discrimination (Constantine, Erickson, Banks, & Timberlake, 1998). Wilson (1996) starkly described the broader consequences of communities with limited access to occupational resources: “Neighborhoods that offer few legitimate employment opportunities, inadequate job information networks, and poor schools lead to the disappearance of work,” (p. 52). Wilson went on to highlight that such a lack of access to the structure of opportunity may lead to a feeling of isolation among those individuals marginalized by historical and existing hierarchies.

Social class has been found to influence not only vocational development and career aspirations, but the ways in which people create meaning through their work (Aries & Seider, 2007; Blustein et al., 2002; Sewell & Hauser, 1975). Though some elements of status or class (e.g., income) may not always be perceived as influential (Paa & McWhirter, 2000), vocational literature indicates relationships between social class and work role salience (Brown et al., 1996; Diemer & Blustein, 2007), occupational expectations (Diemer et al., 2010), vocational aspirations (Ali & McWhirter, 2006; Ali & Saunders, 2009), and views of the world of work (Chaves et al., 2004). Social class has also been linked to occupational self-concept implementation (Blustein et al., 2002), or work as an expression of their skills, abilities, interest, and values (Dawis, 2002; Holland 1997).

The role of occupational self-concept or identity implementation among those with fewer career choices remains relatively under-examined in psychological literature. While traditional career theories have focused on career as an expression of the self (Gottfredson, 1985; Gysbers, Heppner, & Johnston, 2003), those from lower SES backgrounds may not have access to the “grand career narrative” that is often present in vocational research (Super, 1953, 1980), and therefore may have limited occupational choices. As stated by Blustein (2006), “For others who are working primarily as a means of survival, the psychotherapy literature offers little informed scholarship to guide practice,” (p. 228). For example, a common trajectory among young adults from low SES backgrounds is to go directly from high school into a vocation, a developmental period during which the effects of social class have the greatest potential to harm (Blustein et al., 2000; Blustein et al., 2002). Research indicates that the degree to which one makes an adaptive occupational transition into the world of work is directly related to a person’s access to educational and vocational resources (Bynner, 1997; Layder, Ashton, & Sung, 1991; Wilson,

1996). Those with less access to these resources may view work as necessary for survival, a means to make money in order to fulfill physical needs, rather than as an important element of self-expression (Blustein, 2006; Blustein et al., 2002). Yet while traditional models may account for social contexts on some level, their practical applications may not fully address the influence of socio-economic status on culture, relationships, and identity, as well as on individual development and career choice.

In summary, without a cultural focus, vocational psychology has relatively limited applications to clients with restricted access to resource structures, including racial and ethnic minority clients; gay, lesbian, or bisexual, clients; and clients from lower financial or class statuses. The major vocational theories—trait and factor, social learning, and developmental theories—have made some efforts to evaluate their effectiveness with these groups. Theories such as SCCT and Gottfredson's theory of circumscription and compromise have had some success in linking contexts and relationships to career development. However, even these theories continue to regard work from a largely intrapsychic paradigm, where culture is acknowledged without a true exploration of its functions. Post-modern theories, such as social constructionism, provide a theoretical structure that accounts for the dynamic interplay between people and their environment, thus creating a framework for vocational research that focuses on personal and social motivations and the meaning of work.

Contrasting traditional and multicultural paradigms. As previously stated, traditional models of research in vocational psychology have assumed a target audience of European-American, middle-class workers with individualistic values and access to educational and economic resources (Fouad, 2002; Healy, 1990; Smith, 1983). This research was often based in positivist research paradigms, which assume that psychological realities can be

objectively observed and reported as universal laws of human behavior, as measured through the use of rigidly defined and controlled variables (Stead, 2004). Truth is therefore viewed as an “average” in which the human behaviors may be quantified and predicted based on statistical means (Cohen, Duberley & Mallon, 2004; Gergen, 1999;). The dominance of this research paradigm, when coupled with the vast overrepresentation of White, middle class, male, individualistic research samples, has led to biased assumptions of “normal” behaviors and the marginalization of non-dominant cultures (APA, 2002; Blustein, 2006; Cohen, Duberley & Mallon, 2004; Stead, 2004).

This bias towards a majority culture has been described as a kind of “cultural imperialism,” in which the researcher presumes the universality of personal or communal truths (Gergen, 1999). In 2002, the APA’s “Guidelines on Multicultural Education, Training, Research, Practice, and Organizational Change for Psychologists” highlighted the tendency of positivistic traditions to view culture as a nuisance variable which should be, at best, controlled and, at worst, avoided. Such paradigms deny not only the culture of the research subjects but the culture of the researcher as well. According to the APA (2002), ethical research requires the acknowledgement of culture in the selection of a research population, as well as in the generation of the research questions and the selection of methods.

Individualism. Western research paradigms often assume that individuality as guided by independent decision-making will be an objective, inherently superior value, rather than a subjective value, circumscribed by the individual’s contexts (Atkinson, Kim, & Caldwell, 1998; Atkinson, Thompson, & Grant, 1993; Motulsky, 2010). In summarizing their concerns regarding traditional approaches to career theory, Cohen, Duberley, and Mallon (2004) argued:

The conceptual power of the career concept is precisely that it recursively links the individual to the wider, changing social world. Unfortunately, though, much of this power is lost through the prevalence of positivistic approaches and their tendency towards fragmentation and reductionism at the expense of more dynamic, more holistic explanations. (p. 409)

Perhaps because of such concerns, the broad application of traditional positivistic paradigms in the world of careers has become increasingly challenged in the last decade. Multicultural psychologists have started to explore not only the experience of working, but the meaning of work as influenced by cultural contexts (Blustein, 2006).

Collectivism. Vocational research among more collectivistic cultures has examined what Höpfl and Atkinson (2000) referred to as the “ambivalence” about dominant, individualistic definitions of career and success. Those identifying themselves as part of a collectivist culture may value the perpetuation of community and cultural values above individual accomplishment (Sue & Sue, 1999). For example, in Markus and Kitayama’s (1991) review comparing Western and Eastern conceptions of the self, they stated:

American examples stress attending to the self, the appreciation of one’s difference from others, and the importance of asserting the self. The Japanese [Eastern] examples emphasize attending to and fitting in with others and the importance of harmonious interdependence with them. (p. 224)

This emphasis on “harmonious interdependence” has been well-documented within the Appalachian culture, yet there are no investigations into the functions of these collectivistic values in studies of Appalachian career choice generally and the working class in particular (Fisher, 1993; Russ, 2010; Walls & Billings, 2002; Welch, 1999).

Studies of Appalachian culture have also indicated the importance of family and community participation in decision-making, thus evidencing core collectivistic values (Fisher, 1993; Russ, 2010; Walls & Billings, 2002; Welch, 1999). However, the impact of these values on the meaning of work in Appalachia has yet to be explored. As post-modern and multicultural researchers attempt to investigate relational impacts on career, there are calls to study vocational development and choice from a contextually embedded, relational meaning-making paradigm (Emslie & Hunt, 2009). To that end, Höpfl and Atkinson (2000) argued that the future of career psychology for both men and women will necessarily study “the power to define meanings” (p. 141), casting aside assumptions based on individualistically oriented definitions of “success.”

Social construction and career development. Defining meanings is a central tenet of post-modern approaches to career development. Within these paradigms career is no longer viewed as a linear, progressive sequence of jobs throughout the lifespan (Gysbers, Heppner, & Johnston, 2003) but as a system of meaning influenced by an individual’s “unique psychological experiences and cultural, social, historical, and economic conditions,” (Blustein, Palladino, Schultheiss, & Flum, 2004, p. 425). Post-modern theorists assume that there is no difference between the “knower” and the “known” and champion investigations of individual descriptions of experience within context (Gergen, 1999). *Descriptions*, in the realm of human behavior, suggest *language* and *context* suggests *culture*; consequently, post-modern research approaches, such as social constructionism, emphasize the importance of interviews and personal narratives in discovering the subjective and collective meanings of career (Fouad & Brown, 2000; Gergen, 1999). Thus research from a constructive paradigm requires some degree of qualitative methodology.

Burr (1995) outlined four key assumptions that she called, “things you would absolutely have to believe in order to be a social constructionist,” (p. 3). The first is a “critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge,” (p. 3). Such a critical stance requires questioning ideas, categories, theories, hierarchies, and perceptions, even those (perhaps especially those) that are generally acknowledged to be true through empirical observation. The second assumption is that all knowledge must be understood as being historically and culturally specific. Burr stated that all ways of knowing “are dependent upon the particular social and economic arrangements prevailing in that culture at that time,” (p. 4). Burr’s third assumption of social constructionism is that “knowledge is sustained by social processes,” (p. 4); in other words, knowledge is not gained through observation but through the dynamic interactions between people and their environment.

Burr’s fourth and final assumption conceptualized social constructionism as combining knowledge and social action. As stated by Gergen (1996), “it is the individual as socially constructed that finally informs people’s patterns of action,” (p. 146). Such patterns of action, in turn, influence cultural norms, which sustain some patterns of action and extinguish others. Cohen, Duberley, and Mallon (2004) argued that the subsequent perpetuation of certain norms and ways of knowing leads to social action in favor of more powerful groups, thus maintaining cultural hierarchies.

Savickas (1989) documented the emergence of post-modern paradigms in vocational psychology, particularly the prevalence of “constructivism” and the “constructive-developmentalism perspective,” the “meaning-making paradigm,” “the family as interpretive system,” “family drama,” and “hermeneutical inquiry.” By 1993, he identified constructivist perspectives as a force in “reforming” career theory as an “interpretive discipline,” (Savickas,

1993, p. 214), and in 1994, Savickas and Lent expanded on the valuable role of constructivism in a meaningful convergence of the major career theories. Savickas (2000) ultimately viewed vocational psychologists as coming from one of two complementary perspectives: objectivism or constructivism. He indicated that while objectivist researchers have traditionally focused on trait-and-factor models, they are expanding the definitions and applications of the “core concepts in career psychology,” (p. 60) to accommodate the growing body of constructivist research on subjective vocational experience.

Savickas’s (2000) constructivist career development perspective investigates the subjective experiences of *anyone* who works, regardless of their social position or access to resources, thus making it difficult to draw universal conclusions (Blustein et al., 2004). To a constructivist, the subjective experience of a West Virginia coal miner is invaluable, because one actor’s choices produce ripple effects that influence social patterns of action and meaning-making within cultural and historical systems, which, in turn, influence that actor. While an inclusion of diverse psychological experiences provides a meaningful framework for conceptualizing post-industrial careers, such an inclusion also makes it difficult to concretely define constructivist paradigms (Savickas, 2000).

Relational vocational constructs. One such paradigm examines the construct of relationships as they apply to vocation. A social constructionist view of vocational psychology assumes that people perceive their career decisions, resources, problems, and successes in *relation to* their cultural world, and that culture itself may be viewed as a relational construct. However, if all knowledge must be examined critically through a cultural lens, what is a constructionist understanding of culture? Biernacki (2000) defined culture as an active construction of meaning through social (and therefore relational) practices. People develop

within social contexts and are thus shaped by social pressures which in turn define the cultural boundaries within which behavioral choices are made.

A relational paradigm recognizes the subjective experience of individuals as they construct meaningful lives through work and relationships (Richardson, 2004). It also explores the “interwoven nature of culture and relationship” that creates “worklife,” (Schultheiss, 2007, p. 193). According to Schultheiss (2007), this relational vocational paradigm is built on four empirically supported tenets:

- (a) The influence of the family as critical to understanding the complexities of vocational development, (b) the psychological experience of work as embedded within relational contexts (e.g., social, familial and cultural), (c) the interface of work and family life, and (d) relational discourse as a challenge to the cultural script of individualism. (pp. 192-193).

The basic assumption of this paradigm, consequently, is that people are driven by the human need to connect with and attach to others, which influences their development in all areas, including careers. In other words, a relational paradigm, “assists in locating the individual firmly in a relational and cultural surround rather than succumbing to societal perceptions of an individual decision maker who happens to have relationships,” (Motulsky, 2010, p. 1082).

When vocational psychology is understood through a relational, contextual model, the historic demarcation between issues of “work” and “non-work” becomes obscured. Such a separation has always been controversial and has served, in many ways, to marginalize vocational issues among practicing psychologists (Collin, 1997; Hackett, 1991; Swanson, 1995). In spite of the fact that counseling psychology was founded on the profession of vocational psychology (Dorn, 1992; Whiteley, 1984), many in the profession tend to view work identity and

personal identity as separate entities and have little interest in providing interventions from a vocational perspective (Fitzgerald & Osipow, 1986, 1988). Fitzgerald and Osipow documented what they called the “continued diminution of vocational psychology and career counseling as salient characteristics of the discipline,” (1988, p. 575). However, even as the role of vocational psychology appears to diminish, vocational researchers find an increasing amount of evidence that separation between “work” and “non-work” does not exist in clients’ realities. For example, for the majority of Americans, work dominates more than half of our waking lives (Blustein, 2006) and work satisfaction has been shown to be one of the better predictors of longevity (Palmore, 1982). An examination of work from a constructive perspective blurs the lines arbitrarily drawn between work and home and integrates the contexts within which working people find motivation and meaning.

The psychology of work. Blustein’s (2006) psychology of work perspective examines work within a multicultural, constructivist, relational framework. He stated, “My position is that working is central to understanding human behavior and the context that frames life experience,” (2006, p. 2). As such, his theory proposes a multidimensional view of working that embraces a breadth of work-related activities with a focus on the psychological meaning individuals assign to the work that they do. Blustein (2006) provides a four-part definition of “working”:

1. Working functions to provide people with a way to establish an identity and a sense of coherence in their social interactions. In other words, work furnishes at least part of our external identity in the world.
2. Working has a very personal meaning that is influenced to a great extent by individual constructions and by socially mediated interactions with others. Working

also has unique meaning that is derived from and embedded within specific cultural contexts, which shape and are shaped by individual experiences of working.

3. Working involves effort, activity, and human energy in given tasks that contribute to the overall social and economic welfare of a given culture. . . .
4. Working has been one of the constants in our lives; the experience of working unifies human beings across time frames and cultures. (p. 3)

Along with this definition, Blustein articulated three psychological meanings that are commonly given to work: survival and power, social connectedness, and self-determination.

Work as survival and power. As described by Blustein (2006) Maslow (1943; 1968) created a theory of motivation that was built on the foundational human need for safety and the fulfillment of physical needs. He theorized that our actions and interactions are fueled by motivations to meet specific needs, starting with physiological and safety needs, and including love, esteem, and self-actualization. In addition, Maslow emphasized that if one's more basic needs are not satisfied, the more complex needs, such as self-actualization, may become irrelevant. If there is a constant deficit in the most basic needs, the meaning of work may rest heavily upon goals of survival.

A poignant example of work as survival was shown in Wilson's (1996) interview with a Black woman living on the South Side of Chicago:

My husband, he's worked in the community. He's 33. He's worked at One Stop since he was 15. And right now, he's one of the highest paid—he's a butcher—he's one of the highest paid butchers in One Stop. For the 15—almost 18—years he's been there he's only making nine dollars an hour. . . . And he takes so much. Sometimes he come home

and he'd sit home and he'd just cry. And he'd say, "If it weren't for my kids and my family, I'd quit." (p. 69)

This account provides an intimate look into how the need for survival is comprehensively tied to needs in relationships. Blustein (2006) provided an illustration of this kind of work as described in the work of Martinez (1994) with Mexican immigrants to the US:

The silver mine where I worked was about 900 meters deep. It had fourteen or fifteen levels. It was very hot down there, and we would work half naked, carrying sacks all day long. At times there was no air. The water would run through the ditches, and it was so hot that it would vaporize. It was dangerous work. My father ruined his life working in the copper mines of Arizona. (p. 129)

Blustein (2006) pointed out that the work lives of most people are driven by complex motivations beyond interest and value expression, and noted that work as a means of survival may also be motivated by work as a means of access to power.

Anthropologists (e.g., Wallman, 1979) have identified work as the means by which people transform survival efforts into prestige, privilege, and social status through increasing one's access to resources. In the realm of vocational psychology, Blustein (2006) explained the integral relationship between power and work as mediated by two elements of success: access to resources that promote survival and enhanced social status. In the case of coal miners in Appalachia, for example, their membership in the profession may not only provide a relatively good wage (access to resources) but an enhanced social status within their native culture as well. However, if the cultural context changes that same professional identity may detract from their status. It is important to recognize that work is not the sole factor in the development of power, because access to resources may be limited based on arbitrary aspects of appearance or

functioning (Arbona, 1995, 1996; Fouad & Arbona, 1994; Gushue et al., 2006; Manese & Fretz, 1984).

Work as social connection. Work connects people to the broader social world.

Blustein's (2006) model is partly based on the assumption "that human beings have a natural, inherent striving for connection, attachment, and intimate relationships," (p. 95). Evidence abounds that people seek connection with others, even in work situations that may not appear to afford such relationships. In Hall's (1996) book about relational career perspectives, he found numerous examples of social connection among management-level and professional workers. Many of these workers recognized that they did not find their work inherently interesting or self-expressive, yet the social connections they found through their jobs made their work psychologically meaningful. In addition to Hall (1996), Blustein built his theory on the work of many other theorists and researchers who articulated the importance of social connection, particularly in creating "safe relational havens" through peers or mentors.

Blustein (2006) noted the important interface between work and family life. Descriptions of women in vocational contexts highlight the interconnectedness among the multiple roles women play as workers, mothers, and partners (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Gilbert & Rachlin, 1987). One must be careful, however, not to fall into the trap of assuming that only women feel the strain of multiple roles. Gilbert (1992) indicated that women are not unique in the integration of work and family roles: both men and women appear to form overarching identifications based on their perceived success in and out of the home. In addition, Betz and Corning (1993) made the argument that counseling process is the same whether the issues of concern are vocational or otherwise, for both men and women.

Blustein (2006) also emphasized the rich and highly textured interactions between work and home life among all social classes. As with the rest of vocational psychology, research in this area tends to focus on the lives of upper middle-class, professional Whites; however, he cited a vignette from a study of women mine workers (Moore, 1996) that provides a window into several types of social connectivity embedded within one middle-class working context:

With both of us [husband and wife] in the mines, we had an important part of our lives in common. We had the children, of course, and our day-to-day life together, but you get closer when you share work like coal mining. It gave Red [her husband] a new respect for me. And it gave me a much deeper understanding of what his years in the mines have meant to him. After I started in the mine, Red was even more gentle with me. He tried so hard to make things nice for me at home, because he knew what I'd been through during the day. We didn't have that much time together. I worked the graveyard shift, and he was on straight afternoons. But we had morning and weekends, and it was what you would call quality time. . . . On the crew it's like the group becomes a single person. Some wives have trouble with their husbands' developing such a close relationship with women. It's not sexual, but a type of friendship that they can't share. (p. 92)

Work as self-determination. It is important to note, however, that work among those in lower status jobs can represent more than survival or social connectedness; rather, Blustein (2006) argued that work that may not appear intrinsically interesting to outsiders can provide fulfillment in needs for self-determination and identity expression. To illustrate, while psychological research on the influence of working class identity is limited, sociologists have noted a significant coherent identity among those of the working class. Halle's (1984) six-year ethnography of workers at a chemical plant in New Jersey revealed a clear identity among

participants as “working men” who worked to support themselves and their families. Halle (1984) quoted a conversation between one worker and a researcher that illustrated the differential identity of the working man:

Worker: Am I a working man. You bet! I’m standing here freezing and breathing in all of these fumes [a reference to the fumes crowding out of vents in the ground].

Researcher: Are big business working men?

Worker: No. They don’t have to stand out here in the cold.

Researcher: How about lawyers and doctors?

Worker: No, they’re not working men. They don’t have to breathe in this shit [the fumes]. You’re not a working man if you work in an office. . . . (p. 207)

In part through interviews such as these, Halle’s (1984) research revealed three major characteristics that distinguish working class jobs from middle class jobs: 1) working class jobs do not typically require higher levels of education, 2) those in the working class perpetuate the class structure through limiting their relationships with those outside of their status, and 3) working class jobs are typically remote from any organizational decision-making capacity. In spite of this seeming lack of autonomy or individual expression, however, Ryan and Deci (2000) have found that low-prestige jobs can provide a sense of self-actualization if they fulfill some degree of the need for autonomy, the need for relatedness, and the need for competence.

This study will use Blustein’s psychology of work model to investigate the meaning of work among Appalachian coal miners within a cultural context. In order to fulfill Goodman et al.’s (2004) mandate to give voice to the voiceless, the study will collect narrative data and analyze the participants’ language in order to discover the psychological meaning of coal mining to individuals, their families, their communities, and their culture.

CHAPTER 2

Method

Participants

In accordance with recent findings regarding saturation points in nonprobabilistic sampling, it was proposed that the study include at least six participants. This number has been found to be the minimum amount of sources necessary to reach saturation in qualitative analysis (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006; Maxwell, 2008; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Participants in this study included eight self-identified coal miners from the Appalachian region, two more than the proposed minimum. In keeping with the aforementioned findings, if at least six of the eight participants described a theme it was judged to be “significant” and influential in the data.

All volunteers met the minimum recruitment requirements. There were no maximum age requirements, though participants were required to be over the age of 18. Recruitment primarily focused on coal miners who were currently working in the mines; however, the majority of participants interviewed, though still working in the mining industry, were no longer working underground. All participants had worked underground for a minimum of four years. As hoped, their perspectives provided insights into why people transition into and out of jobs, thus deepening understanding about the meaning of coal mining in the vocational development of participants. The resulting sample was representative of the racial demographics of the region, and therefore included a high number of white participants (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010b). No restrictions were placed on the gender of participants, but all but one participant self-identified as male. Prospective participants were excluded if they were not raised in the Appalachian region, or if they spent a significant amount of time living outside of the region.

A detailed description of participant demographics is provided in the Findings chapter, under *Contextual Factors*; however, a brief summary will be provided here. Participants ranged in age from 39 to 62, with six of the eight participants over the age of 55. As stated previously, all but one participant were male. All participants self-identified as white (non-Hispanic) and Christian. Participants' reported tenure working underground in the mines ranged from five to 43 years; however, all participants worked in mining for at least 15 years though not always "underground."

Procedures

Prior to collecting data, the researcher consulted with two retired coal miners in a pilot study. These consultations provided an emic perspective regarding topics to be addressed in the semi-structured interviews, including themes of identity and cultural values, as well as the meaning of work. Because study participants would be answering questions about their current or past employment, retired miners in the pilot study were asked to identify any questions that could be considered "controversial" or dangerous to the miner's reputation or career. The questions were thus revised to minimize any avoidable risk. The input from retired Appalachian coal miners combined with my own research to guide the data collection of the final study. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at West Virginia University (WVU). Participants were recruited through meetings with the United Mine Workers Association (UMWA, District 31), through meetings with the Northern Appalachian Coal Mining Heritage Association (NACMHA), and through classes offered through the WVU Mining Extension Program. Recruitment announcements asked for volunteer participation in a qualitative study designed to solicit input on the choice to become a coal miner and the meaning

of coal mining to their communities, their families, and themselves. Snowball sampling was also used to recruit family members or friends of participants in the study.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interview. Due to the relative lack of psychological investigation into the vocational development of working-class populations, this exploratory study used qualitative methods of data collection. Qualitative methods tend to ask “how” rather than “why,” and in so doing they create new forms of knowing about “how collective dynamics, institutional arrangements, and shared language practices set in motion, sustain, and interrupt ways of being in the world” (Marecek, 2003, p. 57). In this study, these methods included narrative data collected through semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 120 minutes each, with the option of breaking the interview into two or three sessions. Each interview took place in person and all interviews were recorded with full knowledge of participants using a visible audio recording device. The researcher asked if each participant was willing to answer follow-up questions over the telephone after the initial interview in the event that further questions or needs for clarification occur during analysis; however, such follow-up calls were not necessary. Each participant was made aware of the nature of the study, of the projected timeline for publication, and of their rights to contact the researcher or her supervisor any time prior to the study in order to ask questions, add to or change any of their responses, or to remove their permission to participate in the study. This use of narrative interviews made possible the exploration of the collective dynamics among vocation, meaning-making, and identity.

As described by Murray (2003), the use of narrative is central in making sense of the world and one’s experience within it by creating a “map . . . in a sea of time” (p. 97), thus linking life events that may not initially seem to have thematic connections. Such connections are

especially important in the construction of meaning, a primary component of this study. The distinguishing characteristic of a narrative interview is that it describes “a coherent causal account of an event that has occurred or that is expected to occur,” (Murray, 2003, p. 98). In the context of the current study, this “event” is the choice to be a coal miner and the “causal account” will explore the layers of meaning that influenced and are influenced by this vocational choice.

In addition to explorations of meaning, narratives provide an important window into the development and maintenance of identity, because they tell the stories of people’s lives. As quoted by Murray (2003), McAdams (1985) stated, “Identity is a life story” (p. 100). Narratives are thus a valuable source of data in investigating issues of identity, particularly in a cultural context. Gergen (1999) argued that the best way to understand the fluid relationship between personal and cultural stories is to examine the language the individual uses to describe the cultural context. Thus, explorations of cultural and vocational identities were facilitated by the collection and analysis of participants’ personal narratives.

The interview followed an episodic format, in which the interviewer explored participants’ experiences related to a structured series of topics. Questions addressing these topics were formulated from the review of the literature pertaining to Appalachian culture, group differentiation, and multicultural contexts of vocational development. They were also formulated with the help of retired coal miners in a pilot study that explored issues of identity, cultural values, and the meaning of work. The role of the interviewer was to encourage the participant to tell his or her own story by being empathetic, open, and supportive. In interviewing Appalachian participants, it was important to apply knowledge of the interviewees’ culture in order to solicit more comprehensive narratives. For example, it was necessary to

recognize the preferred indirect style of communication among many people of the region, which influenced the way topics are introduced (Wagner, 2005). In her article addressing the adjustment of interviewing techniques among Appalachian people, Wagner (2005) recommended using “how” questions and avoiding “why” questions. She also highlighted the importance of building rapport by revealing some details about the interviewer, such as where she is from, how she feels about the area, and what else she is doing in school. Citing examples of ethnographic interviews done by her students in the Appalachian studies program, Wagner recommended being willing to answer questions posed by interviewees in order to build rapport; however, she also recommended quickly redirecting questions back to the interviewee, staying alert to opportunities to ask follow-up questions. These suggestions were followed in each interview. Questions were asked with the goal of eliciting descriptions, rather than implying answers and thus leading the participant. A list of the interview questions is provided in Appendix A.

Background/demographic questionnaire. In addition to the semi-structured interview, a standard demographic form was administered prior to beginning the interview. Participants were asked to designate their age, race, and religious affiliation, as well as the level of importance religion plays in their life. To address socio-economic status background, participants were asked questions regarding the educational achievement of their caregivers, as well as their caregivers’ occupations and general financial situations. Participants were asked their level of educational achievement, and to provide a “timeline” of current and previous occupational titles in the mining industry during the course of the interview. A copy of the demographic form is provided in Appendix B.

Methods for Data Analysis and Synthesis

The study design consisted of in-depth qualitative analysis of the narrative text from semi-structured interviews with participants. The objective of these interviews was to develop inferences from the common themes that emerged from participants' responses, leading to hypotheses about the nature of the cultural and vocational identities of Appalachian coal miners, as well as about the meaning of work among this population and the systems within which they work. The methodological framework used qualitative methods from grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). This method has been chosen in order to create a model, or theory, regarding culture and vocational development, as well as to explore the meaning (or consequences) of coal mining among participants. Primary analyses were conducted by the author, with feedback and critique provided by the dissertation chair.

As data were collected, the researcher took an active analytical stance by concurrently collecting and analyzing data on various levels. The investigator checked and re-checked emerging theoretical themes by comparing macro and micro perspectives and conducting some levels of interim coding. However, it is important to note that the resulting model does not qualify as purely grounded theory, which demands that ongoing analysis guide participant recruitment and saturation. Due to constraints of time, travel, and responses to recruitment tactics, emergent analyses did not guide sample selection. Rather, the sample was primarily drawn from a pool of volunteers who were found through recruitment methods, particularly work with the Northern Appalachian Coal Mining Heritage Association (NACMHA) and the WVU Mining Extension.

The researcher also focused on her own levels of responsiveness to both participants and participant data by using session memos and by clearly bracketing her own thoughts,

assumptions, and ideas throughout data collection and analysis. Such methods helped ensure appropriate levels of methodological rigor and helped to establish the dependability of qualitative analysis (Golafshani, 2003; Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). Several authors have expressed concerns regarding the use of member checks in qualitative data analysis (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Hammersley, 2007; Morse, Mitcham, Hupcey, & Tason, 1996). Some argue that because qualitative analyses involve the synthesis and abstraction of narrative data, asking members if they feel that the abstractions are “correct” may threaten validity. Therefore, as suggested by Giorgi and Giorgi (2003), validity checks were primarily conducted by the investigator’s chair, who is trained in qualitative methods of analyses.

Grounded theory. In describing the analytical processes and purposes of grounded theory, Strauss and Corbin (2008) wrote that gathering qualitative data allows participants to speak for themselves, and the resulting analysis creates theory out of a common language that represents the voices of the population being studied. Using description and conceptual ordering, grounded theory provides an inductive framework from which researchers may draw conclusions and seek solutions to common problems. Theories that are created out of the phenomena they represent are thus inevitably grounded in the reality within which the phenomena exist.

This theorizing takes place through detailed analysis, which involves an initial “microanalysis” that explores narrative text line-by-line (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). The goal of such examination is to generate initial categories and suggest possible relationships among those categories. Thus, after collecting and transcribing narrative data, the researcher read and re-read transcripts in order to gain an understanding of the data as a whole. This exploration was followed by the employment of analytical tools, specifically asking sensitizing, theoretical, and

structural questions about the data and making theoretical comparisons. This process also used “coding” as analytic process, which involved assigning open, axial, and selective codes. Open coding is the initial stage in processing data, in which general features are named as categories that stand for phenomena (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). Categorical variables are identified and labeled; however, they remain fluid and interpretable along a number of dimensions and may also include a number of subcategories. After assigning open codes, the researcher creates axial codes to identify possible causal relationships among categories. The term “axial” refers to the centrality of the identified category to which other categories are relationally connected. These connections are identified as both structure and process, which are integrated within a paradigm. In other words, analysts integrate structure by investigating processes of who, when, where, why, how, and what happened next (Strauss & Corbin, 2008), thus recognizing the complexity of participants’ paradigms. Finally, selective coding governs the process of developing and refining categories by validating relationships and integrating categories. In this study, validation took place through comparisons to raw data (i.e., interview transcripts). Using these codes, the researcher was able to develop a theory regarding the relationships among cultural identity, vocational identity, and the meaning of coal mining work to participants. In this way, while Blustein’s (2006) theory provided possible psychological structures for the meaning of work, emergent analyses allowed for the identification of components and interactions that were unique to participant experience. In spite of attempts to minimize bias, it is important that a “critical check of the . . . researcher’s procedure can be performed by any competent colleague,” (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003, p. 248). In this study such a check was performed by the dissertation chair, creating a level of validity of the findings. However, also important to the study’s validity is an explication of possible researcher bias.

Researcher Background, Experience, and Bias

In determining how to write about myself as the researcher, I have felt some degree of conflict over how much to reveal about myself. This conflict results from my desires to present my data from an academic standpoint (on the one hand) and my desires to be open about my own background (on the other). I am also aware of a personal penchant towards sentimentality, which I am hoping to avoid out of my belief that a more intellectual presentation honors the participants as subjects worthy of study. I must therefore acknowledge this tendency towards sentimentality as something I have attempted to guard against in the analysis of the data—particularly because I developed strong feelings of affinity for the participants. To a person, I was treated with kindness, openness, respect, and warmth, and I hope to say I responded in kind. However, to the best of my ability, I attempted to put aside my personal feelings for the participants in order to more objectively analyze their experiences. With these caveats, I hope to provide some context about my background, experiences, and biases.

I identify as a white, heterosexual, cis-gendered female from a middle-class background. Growing up, I was taught the value of work by my parents; however, my father's income always provided as much or more than we needed, and my income from various jobs was never required to help support our family. I was born and raised outside of the Appalachian region in a suburban area of Reno, Nevada—a state with a large mineral extraction industry. Although raised in a conservative Christian home, I now consider myself neither conservative, nor Christian. However, I continue to honor many of the values taught throughout my upbringing, including equality, hard work, compassion, fairness, humility, and family.

I have professional and personal interests in issues connected to work, Appalachia, cultural identity and class. Professionally, I have worked as a therapist with clients from the

Appalachian region for two years, and have experience teaching and researching cultural issues. Personally, my interest in cultural identity stems from a background in anthropology and a commitment to social justice advocacy. I have a strong belief in the importance of providing culturally sensitive clinical services to traditionally underserved populations. In addition, in my time living in West Virginia I have come to greatly appreciate this state and its unique culture. I admit a degree of defensiveness of the region and the way that it is treated in mass media, which I generally view as unfairly negative.

It is important to make explicit any assumptions that could have influenced the interviews and the interpretation of the data (Maxwell, 2008). With regards to my research questions, my primary assumption is that cultural identity influences vocational choice among all levels of the social hierarchy, regardless of apparent limitations in educational or occupational opportunities. Prior to beginning the study, I also assumed that the influence of Appalachian culture would be identifiable in participants' language and that narrative accounts would highlight interconnections among the individual, the individual's significant others, and the various systems within which the individual operates (e.g., job, school, church, etc.). I also assumed that these interconnections would reciprocally influence the meaning of work for individuals and their culture in ways that reflect human drives for survival, for social relationships, and for self-determination. Finally, I have a strong bias towards the belief that *all* work is meaningful, and that vocational identity is essential to understanding a whole person. The act of working, in and of itself, is meaningful, and therefore I do not believe that any work is inherently better or worse than any other; rather, different types of work provide opportunities to access and build different parts of one's individual and social identities.

Summary

The methods of this study promote a culturally responsive exploration of the collective dynamics among Appalachian cultural identity, vocational development, and meaning-making among coal miners. The sample was drawn from men and women who identify as being from Appalachia, with at least four years of experience working in underground coal mining. Given the exploratory nature of this study, as well as the relational constructs being examined, narrative data were collected through semi-structured interviews. In-depth qualitative analysis was conducted using an adapted grounded theory to create a model of cultural identity, vocational development, and the meaning of work. Through qualitative data collection and analysis on the psychological meanings of work, this study has the potential to inform psychological practice and research. In addition, this study focuses on the voices of the men and women whose work fuels the energy needs of the country. By analyzing these voices, it is hoped that we can better understand how coal mining influences individuals, families, communities, and both regional and national culture.

CHAPTER 3

Findings

Grounded Theory

This chapter presents a theoretical model for understanding how vocational development and cultural identity influence the meaning of work among Appalachian coal miners. Data from eight interviews were analyzed using the methods of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 2008), with coal mining as the core concept. In one participant's words, the project as a whole was guided by the objective “. . . to get a feel for the family life, and just, I guess cultural identity. You know, what makes people in Appalachia tick in relation to our industry. Which I guess would be coal . . . In a nutshell,” (Participant 7).

The grounded theory was guided by several questions that emerged from the data, including:

- Q1: How do the participants describe their cultural values and identity?
- Q2: How have the participants understood their experiences with coal mining throughout their lives?
- Q3: How are participants' individual identities reflected in their career?
- Q4: What do the participants perceive as uniquely valuable about their culture, both regionally and vocationally?
- Q5: How are these values reflected in their perceptions of what makes their work meaningful?

Grounded theory analysis aims to generate an abstract theory or schema that attempts to explain the process of a phenomenon and to develop a theory specific to the contexts being examined (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The first step in the coding process is “open” or substantive

coding. This process requires examination and categorization of data (i.e., words, sentences, fragments), which are labeled and assigned themes. The second step in the process is “axial” coding, in which data are synthesized within the context of the central phenomenon. The final step, “selective” coding, is the process of integrating the collected data into a context-specific theory. This process is generally organized using the six components of grounded theory: influential conditions, contextual factors, phenomenon (or core concept), intervening conditions, actions/interactions, and consequences (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The resulting theory integrates these components to provide a picture of the dynamic interactions between participants’ vocational and cultural identity developments, and their influence on participants’ perceptions of the meaning of work.

This chapter presents each of these components, as depicted in the figure below (Figure 1). Unless otherwise noted (e.g., “mining as survival/power”), emergent themes were grounded in data from participants. The influential conditions explore participants’ early development within the contexts of Appalachian culture, coal mining, and vocational development. Contextual factors include intermediate stages of vocational development, as well as demographic and personality factors. Coal mining is identified as the central phenomenon, or core concept, of the study, and is briefly reviewed. Intervening conditions explore various aspects of participants’ experience as they gained experience and maturity related to the core concept. Interactions between these processes are discussed. Finally, the consequences of these processes are explored in how participants’ make meaning out of their work.

It is important to note several points in describing this theory. First, due to the constructive nature of grounded theory analysis, it is necessary to recognize that my own worldview, identity, history, and value system have influenced this theory. In addition, my own

understandings of the participants' contexts, and their personal contextual understandings have also influenced the data. Thus, the theory developed herein is only one potential interpretation of the data. It is also necessary to note that, in accordance with aforementioned research guidelines, the use of the term "significant" in the theory indicates that a theme, category, or descriptor was used by at least six of the eight participants.

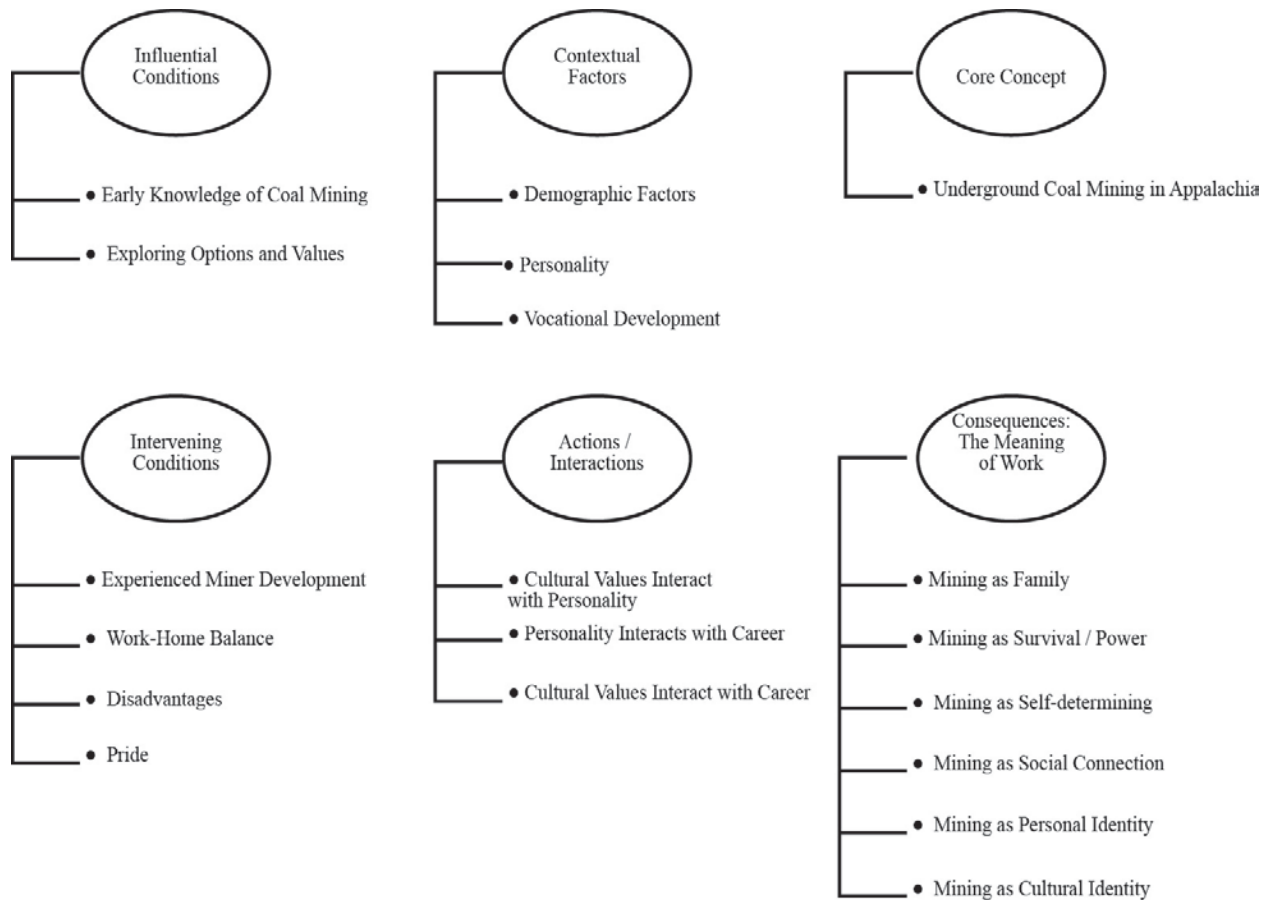


Figure 1. Components of the Theory: How Vocational and Cultural Identities Influence the Meaning of Work among Appalachian Coal Miners.

Influential Conditions

This section explores the themes related to the influence of coal mining on the early development of participants. All participants self-identified as being born and raised in the

Appalachian region, and while intra- or interstate differences were identified by a significant number of participants, several important common elements emerged in discussions of childhood and adolescence (see Figure 2).

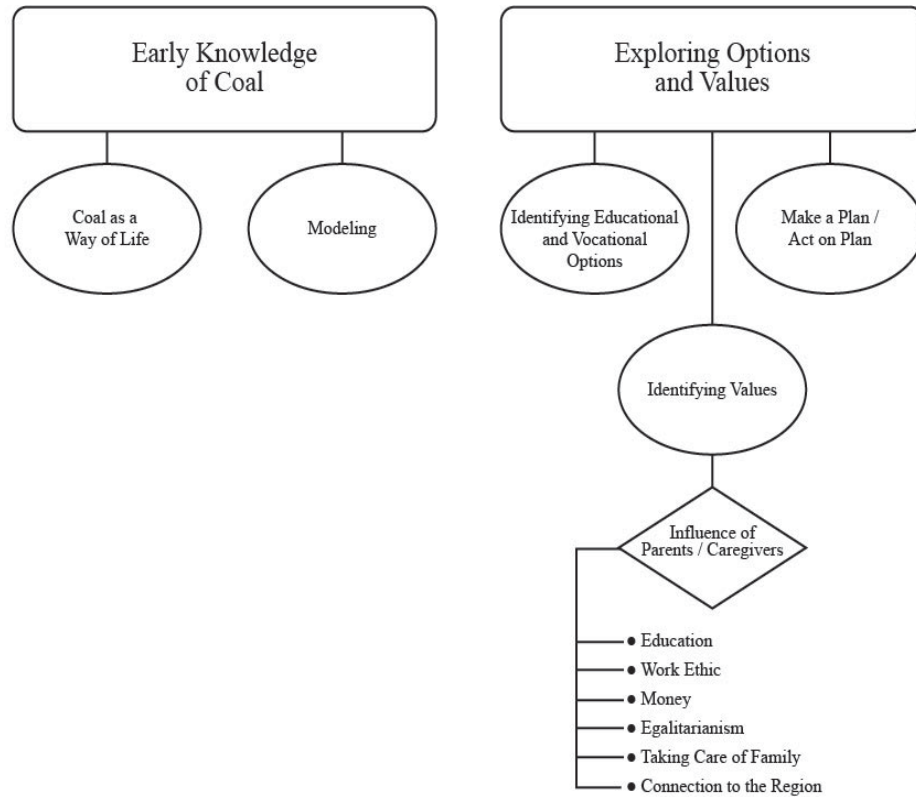


Figure 2. Influential Conditions

Early knowledge of coal. One of the most consistent findings across all participants was an early knowledge of coal mining. Participants spoke of two highly influential aspects of this concept: coal as a way of life and relatable models of mining as a vocational identity. Each of these aspects is detailed below.

Coal as a way of life. All participants' induction into coal as a "way of life" reportedly began before any of them could recall, and surfaced as an important aspect of early vocational development in the data. This finding was consistent across several regions and was true whether or not the participants had parents/caregivers working in the industry. Participants often

responded to questions about their introduction to coal mining with phrases similar to Participant 3: "I've always knew about it." All participants described this knowledge as emanating from their family, their town, or both. Participant 4 described how coal mining was not only part of his family, but integral to the identity of his town:

P4: I mean there was coal mines, not right directly by us, but the main thing where we lived was, like I said, the coke ovens. The other place I lived was a patch town⁵. Right outside the patch, you could see the coal mine. I mean...you know, it was right there, it was just like a part of the town.

S: So, was there ever any time when you weren't aware of coal mining?

P4: Probably not. My grandfather... my father was never a coal miner, my grandfather was an old handloader. So yeah, I was pretty much aware of coal mining my whole life.

Participant 8 identified himself as the "black sheep" in his family due to his employment as a miner among a family of educators. However, he too identified a familiarity with mining from a very young age:

I was aware of coal mining my whole life because of that town that I lived in. You know, every day all day long the trucks run up on the dump to dump refuse, you know, on the refuse dump there. You heard that bull wheel going up and down, taking the cage up and down the shaft, you know, I could almost look from where I lived there on the street and look up at the mine area there and see that cable on that bull wheel goin' up and down you know, so...when that mine shut down I remember my mother sayin', we were sittin' there eatin' dinner one evening, she said, "Boy," she said, "it's sure quiet isn't it?" We wasn't used to that. We was used to hearin' a fan runnin' and that bull wheel runnin' and

⁵ "Patches" are small villages originally owned by a coal company that housed miners and their families. Typical patches included a general store and a church, and had populations of fewer than 500 individuals.

cars comin' by the house you know like late at night when the midnight shift... We had a neighbor lived right across the street that worked there at the mines. Every night at 11 o'clock there'd be a car pull up, his buddy'd pick him up, you know, and take him to work. And then the next morning about 8:30 he'd roll back home again. You know so just...yeah I was *very* aware of mining.

As demonstrated above, participants' early knowledge of coal mining is thus apparently linked to the role of the industry in the creation and maintenance of towns across the region. Mining was very much a physical presence, and all participants mentioned sights, sounds, and smells related to mining as a noticeable part of their childhood experiences.

Modeling. As articulated above, early knowledge of the industry was also gained through associations with family, friends, or neighbors who provided models of mining as a vocational identity. Of the eight miners interviewed, four had a parent or caregiver (father/grandfather) who was a career coal miner, and all but one interviewee could name a family member who had been a coal miner, even if only for a couple of months. Five of the eight participants displayed symbols of their family's coal mining heritage either at home or at work (i.e., photographs, statues, helmets, lunch pails), but all miners interviewed could identify the generations of their family who had worked in the mines. Participant 7, a self-identified sixth-generation coal miner, provided a succinct summary of his coal mining heritage:

My dad was a coal miner. Grandpap was a coal miner. So there's your three generations. My grandpap's stepdad who raised him, and my grandmother's...my dad's mother's dad was a coal miner so I hit that generation. Two great-grandfathers there. And my mom's dad worked a short time in the mines. Didn't like it very much and he got out. But he was a short-time coal miner, so I'm covered there, four generations. And then before

that, it gaps. I'm tryin' to think how this goes...Great-grandmother? Yes! It gaps. My third great-grandfather on my mother's side was a collier—was a coal miner. That's five. And *actually* I'm six, because my first ancestor on my dad's side that came over was a collier, and that's indicated on the 1850 census. He was an old man still workin' in the mines...75 years old still listed as a collier on the census in 1875 so I guess I'm a 6th generation coal miner! Ha!

His enthusiasm about his coal mining heritage was evident, and while not all participants spoke with the same level of animation, all of them expressed a level of pride in their family's involvement in mining. It is interesting to note that all models of coal miners were male, and that the one female miner interviewed had never known a same-gendered coal miner prior to working in the mines.

While modeling of mining as a career was significant for all miners interviewed, the effect of this modeling varied due to a number of different interactions. A significant majority of interviewees identified an early acceptance of coal mining as a major career option. The experience of Participant 6 highlights the influence of modeling on early acceptance. When talking about his childhood, he identified an early understanding that he would work in the mines:

P6: . . . You got to understand my Pap was a miner, my best buddy's dad was a miner. I pretty well knew I was gonna be a miner since I been a kid, so. . . .

S: Yeah. And I know this is remembering a ways back, but I guess what was your idea of coal mining when you were younger? Before you'd been in. If you can remember.

P6: I don't know that I had thought about it at the time, you know, what it would be like, um... 'course as you get older you kind of, just talking to people that worked there you

kind of got a picture of what it was like, and, it wasn't...honestly when I tell you what at my first day at the mine it, it didn't bother me no more than sittin' in here did. I don't know that, I guess because I was around so many miners my whole life that, you know it just, I guess I never thought about it. It's just somethin' you went and done.

Participant 6's experience was unique in his reported early assumption that he would *definitely* become a coal miner (then again, even Participant 6 explored other career options once he reached adolescence/early adulthood). His experience nonetheless highlights the finding across all participants that adult modeling solidified coal mining as a viable career option from participants' earliest conceptualizations of work.

Exploring options and values. A significant number of participants described exploring educational and vocational options prior to committing to a job in mining. All miners reported periods of career exploration even when they reportedly "always knew" that they would be coal miners. A number of themes emerged from the data that defined this exploration, most significantly identifying options, identifying values, and creating/implementing a plan of action.

Identifying educational and vocational options. As previously discussed, coal mining as a way of life and the presence of coal miner models in participants' lives established mining as a viable career option. This option was solidified by an awareness of limited career alternatives within the region. A majority of participants described coal as one of limited options available when they entered the workforce, but a scarcity of job options was identified by younger miners as well. As described by Participant 5 (age 59):

When I grew up, there were mines there.... uh, small mines, there were some larger mines, and then they worked out, and then um, that was about it. They was, you know,

either...occupations, either teacher, or . . . there was a few, you know, some stores . . . things like that. But mining was basically it back then.

In describing the current vocational landscape Participant 6 noted that there may *appear* to be more diverse opportunities, but these jobs rarely pay enough to build a financially stable life for oneself or one's children:

Well there's probably jobs, but, do you want to work at WalMart for minimum wage or do you wanna work at the coal mine for 85 thou- a year? You know? I'm not sayin' there's not other jobs—but well-paying jobs. Which is a different...I'm talking a job you can raise a family, buy a home, and send a kid to school, you know?

All miners interviewed expressed similar understanding of the narrow opportunities available, both in the past and currently.

All participants identified an awareness of the limited jobs available; nevertheless, they all took time to explore possible educational and vocational options after high school. For the majority of participants, however, this period of exploration appeared somewhat unstructured. Participant 2 described how his relative lack of direction after graduating from high school ultimately led to mining:

but you know when I graduated in 1968 I didn't know what I was going to do. I didn't, had no plans. . . . I went to college a couple years—I got a scholarship and I didn't apply myself and so finally they told me not to come back. [*chuckles*] And I was working three days a week . . . I was working construction and I was making decent money, and we went into the District [#] union. Soon as we went into District [#] that August, I got laid off. I'd quit school, and I was draft eligible . . . And so I happened one day I said, I don't

know what I'm going to do I'm going to have to get a job. So um . . . I went up to [the mine] to put my application in to be a coal miner.

Participant 2's exhaustion of other avenues led to a career that lasted over 20 years. Participant 3 described a similar lack of direction in her career exploration. After briefly moving to another state to work in a factory, she was told about possible mining jobs back home in Appalachia by a family friend. She described her thought process as follows:

I knew that when I graduated from high school I either was gonna go to college—which I couldn't sit still and I never liked book work—or I was gonna go somewhere where I could make the most money. And the only thing here would be mining, the hospital—and most of the hospital jobs to make good money you have to get some kind of schooling, and I didn't wanna do that. And I really actually thought I would drive a coal truck.

Participant 3's decision-making process highlights the limited options available, particularly for someone uninterested in pursuing more education. Her account also provides an example of the next significant theme under vocational exploration: identification of values. Participant 3 knew that she did not value academics but that she did value money. Such identification of values occurred among all coal miners, and strongly influenced their vocational development.

Identifying values. While participants generally acknowledged a lack of options when exploring viable careers, they also acknowledged weighing their options within a framework of values. In other words, participants' vocational decision-making processes were marked by evaluations of how well a given career could provide opportunities to live according to identified values. In describing what they valued most, a major theme emerged from the data regarding

familism and cultural identity, namely the strong influence of parents or caregivers in the development of values that motivated vocational choice.

Influence of parents/caregivers. All interviewees spoke of the influence their parents or primary caregivers had on the development of their values. While participants acknowledged general cultural values of the region, they identified their parents or caregivers as the conduits through which these values were taught, regardless of any other factors. As stated by Participant 5: “what brought me my values is my mother and father. I don’t care where I grew up.” A significant number of participants identified the desire of their parents to want better for their children than they had, and translated this to their own children, as well. This desire manifested itself in different ways, and different participants emphasized a number of different values. However, five values were consistently mentioned as influencing interviewees’ vocational development and the meaning of coal mining: education, work ethic, money, taking care of family, and connection to the land.

Education. All participants identified their parental relationships as impacting their world view, and a significant number identified a strong parental emphasis on education. All but two participants attended some college, and five received degrees. Those miners who had children (six participants out of eight) also identified teaching their own children about the importance of a college education. In keeping with previous research about vocational decision-making among young people in Appalachia, many participants spoke of their father’s influence in these domains. For example, Participant 5 identified the strong messages he received about going to college from his father, a career coal miner:

I can remember when . . . you know he would go to work...and he always—I’m the only son, ok? And I was raised, like, he was always wanting better for me. And he always,

you know, scrounged and saved up, and it was from as far as I can remember—I *have* to go to college and get an education. That was, I mean, I *have to*. And my parents were very good for me...And it would've hurt them if I hadn't. But I mean I wanted to, but that was all, you know, you got to do that. And he saved and saved, you know, just to put me through school. The last thing he wanted was for me to go in the mines.

After obtaining a bachelor's degree, Participant 5 worked for 34 years as a coal miner. He stated that his father came to take pride in his vocation; however, this pride was reportedly tied to the increased management opportunities available due to his son's education.

While a majority of participants did not experience any parental disapproval of working in coal mining, a significant number experienced parental pressure to complete their college education whether or not they went into mining. Participant 8 related his father's emphasis on getting a college education, and noted that these messages were passed on from messages his own father had received from a male parental figure:

My dad wanted me to finish college. My dad had worked in the mines during the summer. . . . So he told me that he worked there a couple summers and he said the last summer he was there, between his junior and senior year, that they asked him to stay and continue working. . . . And he had a gentleman that was a good friend of his, more like a second dad to him—his dad had died when he was very young—and he told him, he said, "If you stay to work at that mine and don't finish college I'm gonna kick your hind end!

That's exactly what's going to happen. Because," he said, "You need finish that college!" Generally, the message "go to college" was given to a significant number of miners; however, messages regarding the type of work that could or should be done after receiving a degree were noticeably absent. In fact, only one participant reported ever discussing the types of jobs he

would be able to find after college. The parental expectation appeared to be simply that the participants would work hard in school and later, that they would work hard at a job. Hard work was thus instilled as an important value, no matter the domain.

Work ethic. The value of hard work was consistently referenced as an influential condition across interviews. A strong work ethic was valued in communities, families, and individuals. In talking about his small-town upbringing, Participant 7 summarized it this way: “the attitudes was always family, and work.” Participant 8 echoed this sentiment: “People here are pretty—the majority of ‘em—are pretty down to earth. And pretty level-headed. Have a good work ethic.”

Work ethic was also identified as a family value, as exemplified in this statement by Participant 1: “I always liked to work. I always liked physical work, you know. My family’s that way, I think.” Being from a “coal mining family” (i.e., successive generations of family members working in the mines) seemed to emphasize work ethic as a defining value, as evidenced in Participant 8’s description of his wife’s coal mining family:

That's one thing her family is...I told her one day...somebody was askin' me one day about hiring her or her family. I said, “Somethin’ you got to know about this whole outfit—I've been with them for a long time,” I said, “Number one, they're so honest they make you sick.” [*chuckle*] I said, “Number two, as far as giving you a day’s work, they'll give you a day's work and there won’t be nobody at it any better than they are. I’ll guarantee on that.”

Work ethic as an identified family value is hardly surprising given the fact that, as stated previously, values were broadly recognized as being taught by caregivers. However, this value

was unique in the data as being recognizably taught by parental figures. For example,

Participant 4, who was raised by his grandparents, credited them with teaching him how to work:

S: How do you think that your grandparents were able to teach you those kind of values?

P4: I don't think they actually sat down and taught me. I think it was just from me bein' around them all the time. You know, I did what they did. . . . if they were in a garden, I was in a garden. . . . He was makin' violins downstairs or buildin' a porch or whatever, I was doin' that. I just wish he would have lived longer so I could have learned more from him. Like I said, my father was always away working. Mother was always working, so you know I just wish, you know, he'd lived longer so I could learn some more.

This account highlights the impact of both parental modeling (i.e., they were “always working”), and the impact of being included in family work projects. Family values of work ethic were translated into individual values and self-identified personality characteristics. However, in the development of a theory of how vocational and cultural identity influence the meaning of work, work ethic as a personality characteristic emerged as more of a contextual factor than an influencing or causal condition.

While the data indicates that the *act* of working was viewed as having intrinsic cultural value, each participant was reportedly highly influenced by the concept of compensation for said work. The level of pay that mining could provide emerged as one of the strongest influential factors on participants' core concept of mining.

Money. Every participant identified money as a driving motivator for committing to a mining career, as Participant 5 explained:

Well, I guess when I first started I liked the money. I mean, and of course when you get there and start knowin' people and of course then you like . . . your buddies and you get a

job that you like, and so, but...I guess starting-wise it's—and I'm sure it's why everybody goes at first—is the money.

As implied above, the value on money took precedence over a number of different values, including social connectedness and job affinity. Participant 6, who had expressed a childhood acceptance of coal mining as a career, eventually went to college with the goal of becoming a forest ranger. He identified this as a period of career exploration in his adolescence and early adulthood that was ultimately decided by the value he placed on making a certain level of salary:

S: So you never considered any other jobs?

P6: I wouldn't say that, yeah I was going into forestry, and actually did...but I started lookin', at pay...and I came to realize I could make a lot more money workin' in the mines than I could bein' a forester, so.

At various times in Participant 6's interview, he spoke of his affinity for nature and the outdoors, and a connection with nature seemed to be an important part of his personality. However, as shown above, the ability to make more money took precedence over other values, including his passion for forestry. In addition, his salary made it possible for him to travel for camping and hunting trips, thus providing the means for him to incorporate other values into his life.

Income was generally recognized as the means by which participants could live according to important cultural and personal values. For a significant majority, the value on making money was strongly correlated with the cultural value of taking care of family and friends, and was not significantly linked to a desire to obtain material wealth (unless it was in the care of family). Thus, the combination of limited options, higher pay, and familial values reportedly made coal mining the most attractive option to all participants.

Egalitarianism. While all participants recognized the importance of money, they also all identified a strong cultural value of treating everyone equally, rich or poor. The thread of egalitarianism was woven throughout participants' speech, as evidenced by statements such as "I'm not bragging," (Participant 5), "I'm not saying this to be smart," (Participant 8), or espousal of the "Golden Rule": "you treat someone like you want to be treated," (Participant 3). This value was present in participants' descriptions of their interactions both in and out of work. Participant 2, who worked for years as a foreman, spoke of the importance of treating everyone with respect, especially those who may not have all of the same advantages:

I mean, I felt that I put my pants on just like they did. I wasn't any better than they were. I may have made a little bit more money than they made, I had a lot more responsibilities than they made, but still at the end of the day, you know, we all had to go home to our families and we had to make the company a profit and, you know, had to work safe and that's...that's what it was. I mean, I treated everybody with respect because...I've been on the other side, you know? And my dad was a coal miner and I never forget the way he said you know, "You never forget where you came from." And I never felt that I was better than they were.

The theme of never acting better than others was recognized by every miner interviewed, and, as shown in the passage above, was often linked closely to the idea that hard work equalizes everyone. Among all participants, hard work was articulated as more indicative of a person's value than their accumulated wealth. As stated by Participant 5: "just always do the best you can. And if you did the best you can, and you come home, then you got nothin' to be ashamed of." Notably, the emphasis in this statement is not on reasons to be proud (and thus better than others), but on reasons to not be ashamed. The value of egalitarianism was thus an influential

factor on vocational decision-making since any type work, no matter the salary, was viewed as valid and respectful.

Taking care of family. All participants identified strongly held beliefs in the importance of family and in the primacy of taking care of family and friends. This theme was one of the most highly referenced throughout the interviews, and it influenced participants' lives in a number of ways. Participant 4 identified the importance of caring for others as a cultural and community value:

I think probably one of the things I learned, now that I'm sitting here talkin' about it, is how important it is for me to take care of you and you to take care of me, and have that instead of, you know, I really don't care what you do and all that crap. . . . It's again that community that we grew up in, it was just a close-knit type community.

However family was defined—as related by blood or as part of broader networks of extended kinship—the obligation to help others was a strong influential factor in the vocational development of interviewees, and in the meaning that they made of their work.

The drive to fulfill obligations to family by making substantial wages was mentioned by both older and younger miners. Participant 8 (age 59) described his vocational decision-making process as closely tied to caring for his family, a value which overcame the influence of parental modeling:

Well, my dad was a school teacher, my uncle was a school teacher. That's just kinda what we did, you know as far as...and I thought that's what I was going to do, too. Until I got to be about a junior in college and I saw what school teachers made in West Virginia just startin' out and I said that's gonna be pretty tough to make it on. My wife and I

weren't married yet and was wanting to get married, and I thought to myself that probably the best opportunity for me was to go to work in the mines.

This account highlights the value of *taking care of family* as taking precedence over both social models and educational opportunities in vocational decision-making. Analysis of interviews broadened participants' definition of this value to include the ability to provide security (health care, insurance, retirement), housing, and educational and leisure opportunities for themselves and their families. Participant 2 provided this explanation of the ways that mining helps to not only take care of family, but to preserve and maintain it:

And I just try to be thankful I have a job and with decent insurance, and that my family can have the things and we could, you know. It helped us go on trips and have, be a family, get our house...which I'd never been able to do what I've done.

Another example of the influence of family obligations on participants' decision-making process was given by Participant 7, aged 39, who described his reluctant decision to go into mining in order to support his family after completing a bachelor's degree. While he did not express regret about attending college, he also identified the realities of trying to find viable work in the area even with a college degree:

I got hitched. Got to realize, Oh boy, you got about 50,000 dollars in student loans for a, I've got a bachelor's degree in English. I do! I have a BA in English. . . . But, here I am eight and a half years out of school, pumpin' gas at the gas station, you know...When I got out of the Marine Corps, come home workin' on tires in there. Light mechanic work, I was always good at it. We didn't have a lot of money, my mom's second-hand car. . . . Minimum wage, think about what it was then. Twenty-two years ago or whatever. Twenty years ago. It wasn't a lot of money. And, that was my outlook on jobs. I'm

gonna be back at the same place, making the same kind of money when I get done with a bachelor's, because guess what? They didn't tell me, ten years ago, when I graduate high school that if you go to college, "Yeah you're gonna get jobs! Jobs!" You know what? I'm freakin' weavin' baskets, you know? I had fine art but I'm scrubbin' the crapper that I scrubbed to get through college. That's my job. I'm back at WalMart. You know? That, that thought started to play, and revolve in my mind I thought, Damn, [*chuckles*] what am I gonna do? I meet this girl. How am I gonna afford this? And at the time I was lucky 'cuz I didn't have that many debts. I even had my student loans paid off before I went back. Yeah! I did it right! Now I won't go there but [*gets choked up*]... I thought, that's an option. And slowly but surely, at that time, the mine started to need people. And that was the chatter.

Participant 7 went on to say that he did not enjoy mining due to significant allergies to dust and mold, and although he reportedly never looked forward to working underground he continued in the job for a number of years in order to support his family:

You can make yourself . . . deal with what you have to, your best situation now, and deal with it. When you got people to take care of. Me being by myself, that's a different story. But I'm...you know, being idle for you is not gonna hurt you. If you starve it's your fault for yourself. But when you got a kid to support, you got a wife to support and take care of, then you take care of them. Plus animals, I've got horses. That's tough, too. It's a cost. You gotta take the job that you got offered to you. I was lucky.

Several components of this interviewee's vocational search—the frustration at not being able to improve his situation after earning a degree, the lack of available jobs for which he was qualified, and the desire/need to support a family—reflect the ways in which higher pay seemed

to mean far more than being able to make money for the sake of making money. As communicated by all participants, prioritizing money as a primary value enabled them to live values-driven lives in both personal and professional domains.

Participant 7's above account of disillusionment with post-degree opportunities was echoed by a number of miners: while education was an important value that most participants both were taught by their parents and/or that they taught their children, all miners interviewed recognized that a college degree may not have been particularly meaningful in fulfilling their values of familial responsibility and achieving lifestyle goals. This finding leads to an important question: if education is important, but there are limited high-salaried, degree-required opportunities available in the region, why not leave? Possible answers to this question were found in other cultural values, including connection to the region.

Connection to the region: Nature and community. With a high correlation to values of taking care of family, staying connected to the region emerged as a significant influential condition in the data. When asked if he would ever move away from the area, Participant 8's response represented the answers of a significant number of participants: "No. This is who I am, where I'm from." Participants spoke of their deep affinity with both natural and social aspects of regional culture. Participant 1, who grew up in a more urban area but who had lived in a small town for more than 30 years, described it this way: "I mean, I, it's like ingrained in me. I just love the outdoors and the country. . . . I've just come to like a small town feel, you know?"

A loose definition of this "small town feel" emerged in the data as linked to two domains: affinity for nature and appreciation for close-knit communities. Six interviewees marked their *connection to the region* through prioritizing access to nature and living in less populated—and thus less urban—areas. This value was often most apparent in interviewees' choices of leisure

activities, including hunting, fishing, camping, running, or simply walking in the woods.

Participant 1 passionately described the ways that coal miners interact with nature:

I think coal miners as a rule are some of the greatest caretakers of the environment on the planet. I mean...if you did some kind of like [*chuckle*] survey or statistics on the percentage of hunters that are coal miners, you know, it'd be a high number, you know? And these guys love the outdoors. You know, they love the outdoors. . . . I don't think you'll see a coal miner throwing a candy wrapper on the ground, you know? And that frustrates me a little bit because I think most of the country has formulated the opinion, coal mining is dirty, coal miners are polluters, you know, they have no regard for the environment . . .

His assessment was backed up by a significant number of participants, who spoke with great appreciation for living close to nature and counted it as one of the reasons they would not want to leave the region. As will be discussed later, the influence of a connection to nature re-emerged in explorations of the meaning of mining.

Participants also noted their close, tight-knit communities as another reason they felt tied to the region. All participants expressed knowledge of ways of life outside of Appalachia: all participants had travelled outside of their home state, and many had travelled internationally. However, living in a place where “everybody knows everybody” reportedly linked participants to the region with ties that were deemed irreplaceable. Participant 3 summarized her connection to the area thusly:

S: Just growing up here. What was it like?

P3: Oh, wonderful.

S: Yeah?

P3: I've did a lot of traveling. I would never live nowhere else.

S: Nothing could tempt you away?

P3: I don't think so.

S: Mm hm. What do you like about being here?

P3: Uh, the woods and the country and we used to ride four wheelers, we still do sometimes, when we grew up. We know everybody, pretty well everybody, and it's just the way of life I guess, you know what I'm used to.

In this quote, Participant 3 highlighted several important domains: love for the way of life, knowledge of ways of life outside of Appalachia, affinity for nature, and the importance of a close-knit community. Participant 4 echoed these domains in describing his connection to the region:

I've been to Colorado numerous times. I love Colorado. It is beautiful. . . . The places are beautiful out there. Actually, I went up to—I don't hunt anymore because I've lost my desire to kill anything. I don't want to kill anything, so I don't hunt anymore—but I've been to Alaska. Alaska was beautiful, too, I almost didn't come home from Alaska it was, that's how beautiful it was, but...Yeah, I mean, like I said, [other state] is all right to visit, but I don't want to live there. You know, and there's other reasons, too. There's the people. You know, I imagine, I've never been to New York City, but I imagine it might be on a way of New York City that you know they're just... they're not friendly. . . . I just value...I think different parts of the country have different values . . .

Participant 4's emphasis on *friendliness* highlights the importance of community as a particularly salient influential condition in the data—possibly even more influential than affinity to nature.

All participants cited the importance of community in different ways: from knowing the name of

the gas station attendant to having neighbors care for an ailing relative. Participant 4 described the way his neighbors had helped to care for his dying mother, and credited his community values as creating some of the “best people in the world”:

When my mother was dying...I was gonna, I couldn't have, I would never have her put in a nursing home. I would never. And I didn't do that with her or my grandfather. I had nurses come in and they just come up one day and they said, ‘Move her down to our place.’ And they took care of her until she passed away. See you don't find people like that.... Well, I'm sure they are, but they are far and few between. It's again that community that we grew up in, it was just a close-knit type community. But one thing about our community, is...[*chuckle*] and maybe all coal mining towns are like this, if you were from that community, that town, best people in the world.

This quote demonstrates not only the importance of close communities, but it also demonstrates the way that this value can be inseparable from the value of taking care of family. Such an entanglement of values was consistently found across the data, and more often than not *family* and *community* were central to all causal and influential conditions.

Making a plan and acting on it. With their early knowledge of coal and an understanding of their options and values, participants made decisions about jobs and put occupational plans into action. All participants reported working in a variety of jobs—including mining jobs—or attending college prior to committing to a coal mining career. Of course, they ultimately decided on coal mining as a vocation, and among eight participants interviewed, only two worked less than 20 years underground. Three participants began mining without any intention of staying in it for long (Participant 6 put it this way: “that’s all I was gonna do—work the summer and then go back to school—but it just kinda felt like that’s where I should be and I

never did leave.”) For others, however, coal mining had been their long-term vocational goal. In describing his journey to becoming a coal miner, Participant 4 spoke of his excitement and his willingness to wait for an opportunity to be hired in his “dream” job:

just ‘cause I started in the coke mill doesn't mean that I ever forgot the dream. [*chuckles*]

The dream! Yeah! The dream of bein' a coal miner! It's just, I wanted to work, that's where the money was so I went to work in the coke mill until I could get in the coal mine.

He went on to describe his feelings about being a coal miner:

You're not gonna believe this, because nobody does: I looked forward to going to work. I loved it! I love...I LOVED it! I loved it....it was just like, I don't know, I loved it! I loved working.

Regardless of their course of actions to get there, or their feelings about it when they had committed to coal mining, every participant's plan of action was influenced by the conditions discussed above: early knowledge of coal, exploration of educational and vocational options, and identification of values.

Summary of influential conditions. This section explored the influential conditions in a grounded theory of how vocational and cultural identities influence the meaning of work among Appalachian coal miners. A significant number of participants identified several conditions that related to the core category of mining. First, participants all revealed an early knowledge of coal, both as the way of life in their communities and as the vocational identity of influential people in their lives. Second, participants explored their options in early vocational decision-making processes, including a realistic assessment of the educational and occupational opportunities in the Appalachian region. Third, participants identified values, as influenced by their parents and/or caregivers, which impacted their feelings about mining as a viable career

option. Five values, in particular, emerged as significantly influential: education, work ethic, money, taking care of family, and connection to the region. These values worked separately and together to impact the vocational decision-making of participants and ultimately led them to act on plans to become career coal miners. Each of these conditions influenced participants' understanding of mining and its meaning.

Contextual Factors

Contextual factors for the theory include demographic factors, as well as aspects of participants' personality and career development related to their experience of coal mining (see Figure 3).

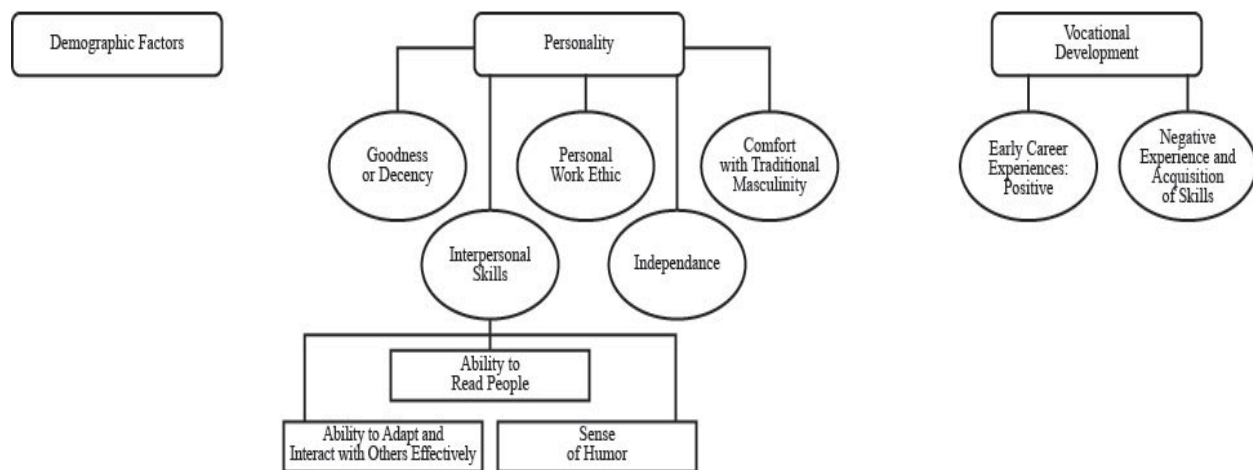


Figure 3. Contextual Factors

Each of these factors situated client narratives within cultural and individual contexts, thus providing a landscape for participant descriptions of the meaning of coal mining. These factors are presented in Table 1 below, followed by a narrative description.

Demographic factors. As described in the previous chapter, participants completed a demographic questionnaire prior to beginning the interview. The information gathered in the

questionnaires was augmented by additional questions asked in the interview format. This information is described in the following table (Table 1).

Table 1

Demographic Factors

	Age	Religion	Importance of religious affiliation	Primary racial identity	Highest grade: mother	Highest grade: father
P1	60	Catholic	Somewhat important	White, non-Hispanic	12	12
P2	62	Protestant	Very important	White, non-Hispanic	10	8
P3	56	Pentecostal	Very important	White, non-Hispanic	12	6
P4	59	Christian	Somewhat important	White, non-Hispanic	High school	High school
P5	59	Baptist	Very important	White, non-Hispanic	High school	High school
P6	53	Christian	Somewhat important	White, non-Hispanic	12	12
P7	39	Protestant/ Presbyterian	Very important	White, non-Hispanic	BA	BS
P8	59	Christian	Very important	White, non-Hispanic	12	College degree

Table 1, Continued

	Parents'/ caregivers' occupation: mother	Parents'/ caregivers' occupation: father	Financial situation growing up	Years in school	Years in mining	Home state
P1	Bank clerical	Sales/ janitorial	We were financially stable sometimes, while other times we didn't have what we needed.	MBA	43	PA
P2	Housewife	Coal miner	We were financially stable sometimes, while other times we didn't have what we needed.	High school + 2 years college	23	WV
P3	Housewife/ retail	Timber saw mill	We were always financially stable & had more than enough	12	38	WV
P4	Nurse	Supervisor	We were financially stable and always had what we needed.	12	37	PA
P5	Housewife	Coal miner	We were financially stable and always had what we needed.	BS	34	WV
P6	Homemaker	Coal miner	We were financially stable and	High school + 2 years	30	WV

Table 1, Continued

			always had what we need	college		
P7	Teacher	Coal miner	We were financially stable sometimes, while other times we didn't have what we needed.	BA	15	PA
P8	Housewife	School teacher	We were financially stable; always had what we needed.	BA	5 under-ground; 30 training	WV

Participants' reported demographic factors provided a contextual outline wherein the meaning of mining could be understood. All participants were male except for Participant 3, who identified as female. All participants were raised in the Appalachian region and had at least four years of coal mining experience. Of the eight participants interviewed, three were from Appalachian areas of Pennsylvania and five were from different regions of West Virginia. Participants' tenure as employees of a coal company ranged from 5 to 43 years, with an average of 28 years. The average participant was male, roughly 56 years of age, and self-identified as white (non-Hispanic). Only one participant identified as female. Because of historically strong cultural associations with Christianity and its related systems of values, participants were asked to identify their religion and the personal importance of their religious affiliation. All participants identified in some way with a Christian belief-system, and five participants ranked this affiliation as "very important." The three remaining participants ranked their religious beliefs as "somewhat important."

Participants were also asked to identify aspects of their parents' educational and vocational backgrounds, as well as information relating to the general financial situation of their family of origin. Regarding parental levels of education, seven participants' fathers reportedly received a high school diploma, and one interviewee's father went on to receive a college degree. One participant's father did not complete high school and dropped out after the 10th grade. Participants' mothers ranged more widely in their educational attainment: two did not graduate from high school, four received a high school diploma, and two received bachelor's degrees. Of the eight participants, only four reported that their fathers were career coal miners, though all reported that members of their family had worked in the mines. All fathers worked outside the home, while five of the eight female caregivers were identified as either "housewife" or "homemaker." Regarding the financial situation of their families, four participants reported that they were "financially stable and always had what [they] needed." Three participants identified being "financially stable sometimes, while other times [they] didn't have what [they] needed." Only one participant (Participant 3) stated that her family was "always financially stable and had more than enough."

Personality. In spite of similarities in their backgrounds, cultural values, and chosen careers, participants presented with a wide range of personality characteristics. However, six characteristics emerged in the data as indicative of the personality of a "typical" coal miner. According to a significant number of participants, these characteristics included: 1) "goodness" or "decency", 2) interpersonal skills, 3) personal work ethic, 4) independence, and 5) comfort with traditional masculinity.

Goodness or decency. When asked to describe a "typical" coal miner, two adjectives that came up repeatedly were "good" and "decent." These terms were generally linked to

descriptions of coal miners as family-oriented and willing to help others—similar to cultural values previously discussed under influential conditions (i.e., “taking care of family”). These terms and their associated values created a contextual foundation for the meaning of mining to individuals, families, and communities.

Participant 3 provided a description of the “goodness” of miners, which she related to issues of family and looking out for others in and out of the workplace:

Most of ‘em, about all of ‘em, the majority of ‘em, are good people, family people. There for the insurance and workin’ to make a better way for their families. They all, almost always, if you see one during the night, or when you’re getting ready to go in, they’ll say, “Hi,” and then they’ll say “Hey, be careful,” or, “You be careful.” It’s always “Be careful.” Or, “Watch what you’re doing.” And then when you leave to go home, they come in they always say, “Oh the roads aren’t very good. They’re kinda greasy out there you better be careful of the roads.” It’s more like a...you almost become a family I think because the days that we work, and the times that we see each other and then work together.

Participant 3 described being “good” as being synonymous with an orientation towards taking care of one’s family. She also identified the ways that this focus on family extends to coworkers, who express care and concern for each other’s safety, and who spend so much time together that they develop bonds similar to kinship. These types of descriptions were common among participants, all of whom also identified helping others as a core characteristic to describe either themselves, coal miners generally, or both. When asked about cultural values in Appalachia in general and among coal miners particularly, Participant 2 stated, “I think it’s a unique culture of people. And I think they’re very kind and generous and helpful and probably more forgiving and

probably more to help in time of need than some other[s].” Taking care of each other, just as one would take care of family, was characteristic of a typical coal miner’s goodness or decency.

Interpersonal skills. Another common description of participants’ personalities was their ability to work well with people, which created a framework for their feelings of social connectedness, and ultimately, the meaning of work. Three characteristics seemed to define these skills in the data: the ability to read people, the ability to interact with people effectively, and a sense of humor. Each of these characteristics will be described.

Ability to read people. Participants recognized the ability to read people as necessary in order to build a social network that you could trust, which, as will be discussed later, was foundational to the meaning of work. Reading people was described as important for a number of reasons, most of which reflected deeper cultural values of “goodness,” or the willingness to help friends and family, as well as for reasons of safety. Participant 4 spoke of the need to get to know someone beyond a “first impression” not only for the sake of working relationships, but because his definition of friendship mirrored bonds of family and kinship. Such familial bonds, as discussed previously, are often defined by values of taking care of each other and sacrificing the self. The creation of such bonds, according to Participant 4, requires the ability to know who may be worthy of such a relationship:

I like to see a person for like—because you know how they say "first impressions"? Well you know maybe, for some people, but you know first impressions can be false, they can be this...You have to be around a little bit, around somebody a little bit to see what they're really like. You know? Get in a sticky situation, or a situation where something is not normal. You know, if you're my friend, I'll do anything for you, help you in any

way. There is nothing too big or too small that you could ask if you're my friend that I would do for you. Money, whatever. You know, whatever. If I have it, you can have it. Participant 4 described a number of friendships formed in the mine as worthy of this trust, and noted that these friendships continued in spite of time, distance, or retirement. He, along with a significant number of miners, described such friendships as integral to job satisfaction.

For some participants, learning to read people was not only fundamental to job satisfaction, but essential to their ability to do their job. Some found this to be particularly true once they became managers, while others realized this relatively quickly when they first started working. Participant 3, the only female participant interviewed, described her ability to get to know people, or “learn them,” as essential to her ability to continue working. In the early 1970s she self-identified as one of the first female coal miners in the region, and noted that her ability to read people became a matter of emotional and vocational survival:

I thought everybody'd treat you like you wanna be treated but it didn't happen like that. There was some really rough people and there was some things that they said and done and I just had to pray every night thinking, God I don't know if I can make it, I don't know if I can take this. . . . And being around all men I didn't know how filthy dirty some men could be. And some of the people that you thought were honest weren't. And I grew up as you trusted people. And you always gotta tell your kids, or your family or whatever, don't—everybody's not trustworthy. Even though you were brought up like that and you see it in 'em, you could almost tell about somebody after you learn 'em, or their facial expressions or their...or how they are or watch what they do. But at that time I didn't know that. I just thought everybody was the right kind of person. And I got fooled. And, the longer I was there then I got on a section, and I got on a section with

good people. They were, the guys were married. Some of ‘em weren’t and they still would ask you, “Oh, hey let’s go here or there,” but they never—they’d ask you once or twice and then let it go, but they never pushed anything on you. They never did silly stuff out of the road, they were more mature people, older. Some was my neighbors, my husband’s uncles. And after I learned people it just, you knew who to go around, who not to. And there was always one or two people that had something to say, but they weren’t worth the time of day anyway so, you just went on.

Due to her unique position as a minority in the workforce, Participant 3’s description of this interpersonal skill is particularly poignant. While not all participants shared her distinct perspective, to one degree or another the ability to read people was recognized by all participants as an essential characteristic in the personality of career coal miners.

Ability to adapt and interact with people effectively. The ability to read people was recognized as distinct from being able to interact with others effectively. Interacting with others effectively was often intertwined with closely held values, including egalitarianism and caring for others. The importance of this characteristic was recognized in a number of different domains, particularly management. As described by Participant 7, the ability to understand people’s personalities was almost a requirement in order to get along with others in the mine due to the wide variety of personalities in the workplace:

Well, [*chuckles*] being able to, this would be the trick—if you could deal with all types and know how to interact with all types. . . . To peg your personality and what the traits are for different, different ends of the spectrum and how you would interact with those people, because you have to! To make you more marketable when you interface...you know all that bullshit cuz it’s a business. Um, but it, it was helpful to know that. He such

and such is introverted. He's analytical—listen to the way he talks, if you interrupt him he's just going to be quiet and listen to you and watch you...but it might make him mad. Or if you got a couple words wrong on this document that you gave him it's gonna bother him, he's gonna start pacing. But he might not say anything to you, you don't realize you make him mad [*chuckle*]. That sort of thing. If we knew how to do that for any miner that would be the trick because you gotta whole ball of wax, a hodge podge there. Eighth grade educations, some high school diplomas, different personalities, you got college people comin' in with experience and then with no experience, you got people that think they know it all, you got people that don't want to know anything and do anything. It is a struggle.

The need to be able to “size up” various people, to be able to understand their personality and motivations, was recognized by almost all participants, particularly by those who had worked in management (i.e., foremen).

Participant 8 recognized the importance of one's personality in not only being able to read people, but in interacting with them in effective ways:

And I've always said bein' a foreman it's, probably as much of it's the human relation skills as it is as the book knowledge and what you know about mining. How can I give an order to this guy and he'll do that and do it in a way that I don't have to go check on him and stuff like that, you know? Your personality has a lot to do with that right there.

Participant 8 described his adeptness with others as part of his personality, but also recognized the need to problem-solve for the best ways to interact. This ability to problem-solve or adapt to the needs of others in order to interact effectively was noted by all participants as a necessary characteristic for coal miners.

While almost all participants reflected personalities with strong social skills, five miners noted that they had to learn how to interact in the work setting by adapting personal expectations and modes of relating. Participant 1 summed it up this way:

Well I learned, I learned you know valuable lessons at that time. And the biggest one being that you know you cannot dictate to your workforce [*chuckles*], you know. I mean you can temporarily, you know but, uh, you have to be a human being, you know? You have to be . . . compassionate and earn the respect of your crew, that kind of thing. You just, you just cannot impose your will on people.

As stated, the “lesson” of how to interact with others effectively was something many participants had to learn on the job—interpersonal patterns that had proven effective before had to be adjusted to different people and situations. The development of an effective interpersonal style sometimes took time to mature, but it was an important aspect of participants’ personalities.

Sense of humor. One of the most salient aspects of participants’ interpersonal styles was their sense of humor. While not always stated explicitly, the use of humor was referenced by seven participants. When asked to describe the personality of a typical coal miner, Participant 2 stated: “I think, work hard play hard. And a lotta sense of humor.” Among participants, humor was most often used or described in two forms: self-deprecation or teasing.

Self-deprecating humor was noted and/or used in a significant number of interviews. With possible ties to the identified cultural value of egalitarianism, most participants demonstrated abilities to laugh at themselves and their loved ones. They brought up perceived weaknesses with a chuckle and a joke, or made jokes that referenced negative stereotypes of the region. Participant 8 provided an example of the latter, with the stated caveat that making jokes about Appalachian stereotypes was only acceptable from a member of the community: “We can

talk about each other as long as you're from [Appalachia], but let somebody else talk about us then buddy you've got problems.” He went on to share a story about returning home from a vacation with his wife, who had a sudden urge to use the toilet while people were still boarding their flight home:

She turned around and was going against the grain of everybody coming in, you know. There were a bunch of women there who had been at an Amway convention or something, and I told them, I said, “If I hadn't have been with her so long I'd divorce her.” I said, “Man, she is aggravating!” And them four girls, they jumped up and they started saying, and there's a whole bunch of people around us, they started saying, “We'll take her side, and say what you did wrong to her and how you was talking about her!” and everything, you know. I said, “Now girls, hold it. Just a second,” I said, “You got to remember one thing. We're from [Appalachia]—if we get a divorce we're still brother and sister.” *[big laugh]* That plane just exploded! *[laughter]* That one guy was sittin' across the aisle from me, he said, “That's the best one I've ever heard!” You know it just took all the tension off and everything else because, I thought there's that stereotype of [Appalachia] here, right there!

This example demonstrates a number of interpersonal skills, including the ability to read the people on the plane, the ability to respond to other passengers' statements (adaptation and interpersonal effectiveness), and the use of humor to diffuse any tension caused by his and his wife's actions.

Participants also noted a tendency to tease or prank each other in the workplace, and referred to these instances as expressions of care, acceptance, and friendship. Participant 1 smilingly referred to a time when he was teased for having long hair, noting with a sarcastic

tone: “I took a lot of crap from some coal miners . . . if you can imagine that.” Participant 6 provided an example of such humor in talking about one of his friends:

I had a guy matter of fact, we was talkin’ about him earlier, me and him worked together at [mine] and me and him, just me and him worked together for a lotta years, and, just a *good* person, just a person you like bein’ around, you know? He was just a good guy, and we worked so well together. And I always told him, “You know why they keep us together? You gotta have brawn and brain—I’m the brain you’re the brawn.” I said, “You always remember that, you know?” [*chuckles*] And it was just, we was buddies.

Participant 6 noted “if you’re sensitive there’s no use of going in the coal mines because those guys are gonna eat you up! [*laughs*] If you’re thin-skinned it’s probably not a good place for you!” He then went on to tell the story of how he’d received his nickname, which was given to him by his co-workers just before his wedding:

We worked midnight shift, so Friday morning I would start vacation. I was getting married over vacation. So I went in and shot those three shots and we went back. The men was just kind of hangin’ around. And I seen them guys a-gatherin’ up. I said, “These birds are up to something.” So of course they attacked me. Got me down. Took my clothes off, and painted my, a certain part of my anatomy . . . with spray paint. Ok?

[*laughter*] This is Thursday night, Friday morning, and I’m gettin’ married Saturday.

After this incident he became known by co-workers, friends, and family (and by this researcher) by a nickname that referred to the color of paint used in the prank. He also insisted on this nickname being used in the ceremony when he married his second wife. This story demonstrates the typical sense of humor displayed and appreciated by most participants: they did not take

themselves seriously, they were able to laugh at themselves and the idiosyncrasies of their culture, and they appreciated teasing and pranks as expressions of acceptance and care.

While some of these characteristics may have taken time to develop, the contextual factor of personality was partly defined by interpersonal skills, specifically the ability to read others' personalities, the ability to interact effectively, and the ability to use humor. Participants recognized these characteristics as contextual factors for the meaning of their work.

Personal work ethic. In addition to *goodness/decency* and *interpersonal skills*, *work ethic* emerged from the data as an important contextual factor. Every interviewee spoke of work as both a cultural and a personal value that they expected from themselves and respected in others. Participant 5, who worked in mining for 37 years and now teaches mining courses, described work ethic as a willingness to try one's best, and counted it as more important than experience or education:

The people I've worked with are, most of them . . . are very good people. Good, hard working people. And like I've always said and even tell them [his students], like someone, if I was a foreman . . . I'll take a person that, maybe this person's got more qualified, or you know whatever, but this person, I know, would do his best.

Hard work was viewed by all participants as inherently valuable, even if one was not the most knowledgeable or skilled, and even if one did not particularly enjoy the work.

One interviewee, Participant 7, was the only participant who identified disliking the work of coal mining. He spoke of a time he “dreaded” going to work every day due to various conditions. However, he stated: “I worked my ass off. We all did, we did our part. But everybody did a little bit, we didn't all, one guy working too hard at that process.” In spite of his dislike for the work itself, his value of hard work carried him forward and helped him to feel a

part of the larger work force. Because of shared work ethic, Participant 7 built strong bonds of friendship with his co-workers, and came to identify that mine as his “favorite”: “That was my favorite, and it ended up being the favorite mine I’ve ever worked at. And I’ve been to some good ones since. That [Name] mine was my favorite. Because of the people. The way we operated.”

The value of hard work as the foundation of friendship was mentioned by five miners, including Participant 1. He spoke of having some difficulty finding a steady group of friends, at first, due to being an “outsider” who moved to the area from a different state. Ultimately, he found a group of men with whom he could relate:

Young guys mostly, and hard workers. I always liked to work. I always liked physical work, you know. My family’s that way, I think. So I kind of, I think you know I kind of gravitated to the more productive guys, you know, and we enjoyed it. You know we would challenge ourselves to get a lot of work done.

Work as a personal ethic thus acted as the foundation for the way many felt about their jobs, and created a contextual framework for the meaning of coal mining.

Independence. Work ethic was often described alongside accounts of individual hard work and independence. As described in the above discussions of influential and contextual factors, the identified values of people from Appalachia are relatively collectivistic; however, participants also identified as highly independent personalities. While all participants described themselves as willing to help others, even at a cost to themselves, they also displayed a lack of expectation that others would do the same, and a reluctance to accept help—even from family—unless in dire need.

This value on independence emerged in any number of situations. Participant 1, for example, spoke with pride about independently paying his way through school. Participant 7's value on independence drove his early career search outside of Appalachia: "I wanted to get the hell outta there. Heck with this farm town you know? I wanna go somewhere else and just get away from here. Sorta like my own, I need to make my own way." After being laid off, Participant 3 described her desire to contribute financially even though she knew she and her husband would be financially stable on one salary. She stated, "I felt like I needed to contribute. Plus I like my own money and I like my own stuff." While situations varied, a significant number of participants identified independence as an important contextual factor in identifying vocational meanings.

Comfort with traditional masculinity. One final aspect of personality that stood out in the data as an important contextual factor was coded under traditional concepts of western masculine gender expression. This was variably defined by participants through such concepts as being fearless, adventurous, or willing to take risks; being "strong" or "tough;" being relatively stoic or unemotional; and being willing to sacrifice the self for those under one's stewardship (i.e., employees, coworkers, spouse, children). Contextually, these expressions of masculine identity related to expressions of vocational identity: by identifying as a coal miner, they were solidifying their identity as "men."

Comfort with traditional expressions of masculinity was found across participants, no matter their gender. Participant 3, the only identified woman in the sample, described herself as able to adapt to cultures of masculinity due to a lack of interest in traditional markers of femininity. In describing her decision to apply for a job as a coal miner, she stated: "I just thought, I'll try it! It really wasn't, and I wasn't afraid, because most things I was around

growing up was boys, you know what I mean, I didn't play with dolls.” As for male interviewees, Participant 4 eloquently described how his masculine identity provided context for vocational meaning:

Maybe it is like a macho thing—would I have felt like a man doing something... Maybe, you know, maybe people in this part of the country, maybe they do have this macho thing. But I...as a matter of fact that *has* to be what it is. I always wanted a "man's job." I wanted to be a man! And that's what I did. Yeah, probably since you brought that out, that's probably exactly it. I wanted to be a man and I wanted to do a man's job. I didn't want no sissy, I didn't want to be no school teacher, not that there's anything wrong, I didn't want to dress up in a suit every day. I wanted to be a MAN. I'm a coal miner. And I was proud of it. I don't care what people...I was proud of it. I still am.

While most participants did not make this link so explicit, a significant number identified characteristics of traditional masculinity that aligned either with ways that they were able to express themselves on the job, or with ways that they felt fulfilled by their jobs.

Career development. The final set of contextual factors—in addition to demographic factors and personality—emerged from descriptions of participants' career development. In particular, participants' early experiences in the mines, as well as their experiences as they learned new skills, provide a framework for their understanding of coal mining.

Early career experiences: Positive. Of the eight participants, five described their early days in the mine as unmitigatedly positive, at times noting high levels of excitement and anticipation. Participant 5 described his excitement about exploring his working environment as a “red hat”: “I was excited. Never was scared about, you know, goin' in. For some reason it

didn't...I was excited. It's like bein' in Disneyworld! I wanna go in, see what it looks like!"

Participant 4 described becoming a coal miner as the fulfillment of a dream and stated:

My only concern was I couldn't get in. That was my concern: I could not get this job... I can honestly say—my wish came true because I wished to be a coal miner and by golly that's what I ended up bein'.

For others, early experiences were defined by a feeling of comfort, rather than excitement.

Participant 6 stated:

Honestly when, I tell you what, at my first day at the mine it didn't bother me no more than sitting in here did. I don't know that, I guess because I was around so many miners my whole life that, you know it just, I guess I never thought about it. It's just something you went and done.

Participant 8 concurred: "The first day I ever went to the mines I had that same feeling I have about [hometown]. I was in a comfort zone. I liked it." These early experiences of excitement and comfort provide some context for the ways these participants understood their experiences throughout their career.

Negative experiences and acquisition of skills. Others' experiences were not so positive, although every participant spoke of adapting in order to find some level of comfort with and even love for their job. These adaptations often came with finding one's footing by developing skills, and, as mentioned previously, by finding a group of friends. Participant 2 described his initial trepidation about going into the mines, and how this was alleviated with acquisition of skills:

S: Going into mining what expectations did you have?

P2: I was scared. I was scared.

S: Were you scared? What were you scared of?

P2: Yeah. Um, when you first went in it was strange. You know it was, it was dark, cold, the smell was different.

S: Can you describe the smell?

P2: And um, uh, the smell was like they used a lot of wood underground for timbering and all that, and you could smell the fresh cut logs and things like that, and I didn't think you'd be able to smell that kind of smell, odors and stuff. And um, the work was hard, but it wasn't that hard. You know. I'd worked the Penn Line, I'd worked a lot harder at Penn Line than when I was in the coal mines. And uh, all the, you know the lot of equipment, the big equipment, it was kind of, uh, awkward to get used to them, being around it, you know it takes a long time to get your bearings and to be able to walk and look with a light. It takes a lot of eye coordination to get accustomed without stumbling and falling all the time because it's totally, it totally throws you clear out of reality. . . because you know your depth perception's not good, your eyesight is kinda...but you know, after a couple weeks you learn to focus a little bit differently and you learn not to put the light in somebody's eyes all the time. *[smiles]* You know, you learn those things.

Just as with positive experiences, negative early experiences—even when overcome through increased self-efficacy and social networks—provided some context for participants' interpretations of their individual careers, and coal-mining in general.

Summary of contextual factors. Three main categories of contextual factors emerged from the data: demographic factors, personality, and vocational development. An examination of demographic factors revealed a number of similarities between participants, such as self-identified race (white) and religion (Christian). There were a number of differences as well,

including a range of ages from 39 to 62, and a range of tenure in the mines from five to 43 years. Demographic data provides a contextual framework for participants' interpretations of cultural and vocational experiences.

A number of personality characteristics were also contextually significant, including goodness or decency, interpersonal skills, personal work ethic, independence, and comfort with traditional western expressions of masculinity. These characteristics, as well as the early career experiences of participants, provide context for participants' understanding of the core concept: underground coal mining in Appalachia.

Core Concept: Underground Coal Mining in Appalachia

Of the five research questions that emerged from the data, four inquire about participants' perceptions of their careers in underground coal mining (the fifth focuses solely on participants' cultural values and identity). Narrative descriptions of the personal, social, and cultural influences of underground coal mining in Appalachia clearly impacted every other component of the theory. It is therefore necessary to locate this core concept with a brief, objective understanding of its basic parameters, without the influence of participant bias. For these reasons, the following description of coal mining will not include participant description.

Since the late 19th century, industrial coal mining has been a part of Appalachia (Lewis, 2000; Shannon, 2006). According to the latest numbers released by the U.S. Energy Information Administration (2013), coal companies employed 39,850 underground miners in Appalachia during 2012. In the two states represented by study participants, Pennsylvania reported that 6,120 of the 8,927 total mining employees were underground coal miners, while West Virginia reported that 17,085 of the 22,786 coal mining employees worked underground. A majority of the coal mined in these states is mined underground, rather than at the surface. Coal has had a

significant impact not only on the economy of these states, but on the culture as well. Although it is difficult to quantify, the influence of coal mining in Appalachia is well-documented (Bell & York, 2010; Shannon, 2006).

Intervening Conditions

As participants explored their experiences in coal mining, they described a number of intervening conditions that influenced the way that they viewed their cultural and vocational identities (Figure 4). Four domains, in particular, stood out as significantly influential:

experienced miner development, work-home balance, disadvantages of coal mining, and pride.

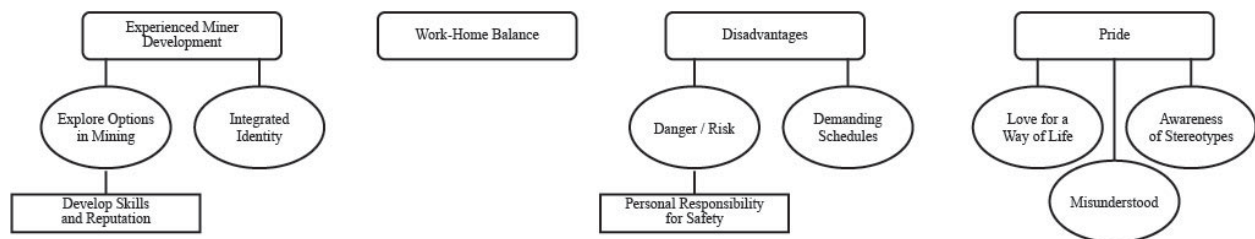


Figure 4. Intervening Conditions

Experienced miner development. Participants' descriptions of their vocational development were generally divided into four stages: early, experienced, pre-retirement, and post-retirement. The miners' descriptions of the "experienced" stage indicated the presence of significant intervening conditions. A significant number of participants noted interventions in two areas: explorations of job options within their chosen careers, and the integration of their coal miner identity with other aspects of identity. Each of these will be described below.

Explore options in mining. All participants explored different positions within mining throughout their careers. These changes in jobs reportedly influenced their understanding of the industry and the people in it. The researcher identified two personal biases in asking questions about job options in mining: 1) she assumed that there was relatively little variety in jobs

underground, and 2) she assumed that participants would view the necessary monotony of some positions as a detriment. Both of these assumptions proved to be false. As stated by Participant 1, many participants viewed their jobs as “an everyday adventure . . . you do something different all the time.”

All participants reported variety in the number of job options they could bid on underground. In describing the various positions available, Participant 2 compared the mine to a city:

It's like a little city down there. I mean, you know, you got track people, you got wire people, you got block people, you got belt people, you got water people, you got...you know all these different jobs that you gotta do. You got construction people outby, you've got face people, you've got continuous miner crews, you got longwall crews and, you know, everybody's got a job. You got rock dusters and...you know, you name it and you got it. . . . And everybody has a job to do.

All participants described relative freedom to change jobs within their larger organizations. Participants described making a number of vertical and lateral career moves, motivated by interest, skills, or the desire to work with certain peers or with certain levels of autonomy/responsibility. Mid-career layoffs were also reportedly responsible for such shifts, as well as participants' desires to get promoted to better-paying positions.

Seven of the eight participants described coal mining as favorable to upward mobility: there were purportedly ample opportunities to learn more, gain more skills, and make more money. In describing his own career, Participant 2 identified a series of deliberate choices meant to propel him towards positions of greater responsibility:

Well, I knew I wanted to work my way up. I knew that I didn't want to be a section boss all my life. I knew I didn't want to be a longwall coordinator all my life. And so I always had that next job lined up that I was gonna try to achieve that next job. And my last job was the operations coordinator where I was in charge of all the longwalls.

Moving away from "union" to "company" positions (i.e., moving away from labor positions into management) was sometimes a difficult decision for many participants and required some degree of finesse with different social and vocational groups. However, such a move was necessary in order to gain access to higher levels of influence and resources.

While all interviewees reportedly worked toward positions with either higher responsibility or higher pay (or both), seven of the eight participants described a great deal of love for the manual labor positions they held along the way. Participant 6, for example, described his feelings about both managerial and manual labor positions:

P6: I don't think anybody enjoys being a foreman. Maybe I'm wrong. I don't think that you enjoy it simply because I think it's a no win situation anymore, you know? But, I guess probably my favorite job was roof bolting.

S: Yeah? What did you like about it?

P6: I d-, I don't know. I liked roof bolting. You know one thing, you know, you're constantly busy, you're bolting, bolting, bolting. The day goes by. Usually nobody's bothering you, you know. It's you and your buddy bolting and...you know?

While not all participants described a great love for manual labor, four of them noted that repetitious work, such as roof bolting or shoveling, was often a draw to a particular job, rather than a disadvantage. On the other hand, every participant who had become a foreman (six out of eight) described it as highly stressful, sometimes unsustainably so, and often due to the relative

unpredictability of the job. Participant 7, in describing a “typical” coal miner, identified that many miners liked repetition:

Someone who may not—collectively—may not mind repetition. Doin’ the same thing, day in and day out. Some guys, you couldn’t get ‘em off of their job as a roof bolter, and if you did they’d get so mad...they wanted to do that day in and day out, that’s their job.

Participant 3 described her positive feelings about shoveling coal for the past eight years of her 38-year mining career. She highlighted the advantages of having a structured set of responsibilities, opportunities to socialize, and high levels of autonomy that counterbalanced noted disadvantages:

P3: So I started actually shoveling now and that’s what I’ve been doing the last eight years

S: Are you doing what you want to be doing?

P3: Yeah, I think I am because I’m older. I can take my time. I know what I’ve gotta do they’ll give me a list, and I can get done as much as I can of it. And if I don’t get it all done, if it’s something they know, they don’t say anything. And if I have to go to the restroom there’s not a bunch of people, um it’s just me and one other, or two other people. Um, you have more freedom. You can talk and, a little bit, and if the belt’s off you can talk across the belt to each other. And it’s just like, you’re on your own and you’re in this big place but you’re not with, you’re more, you feel more laid back. And too, working midnight you get sleepy. Well this job you’re up moving around. On the buggy you was going back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, and it got monotonous. But now this job’s harder, hardest to me because it’s manual. My arms hurt here and I went the other day and he told me I have tendonitis, from repetition of

doing the same thing every day. And my wrists and my hands go to sleep and then my back hurts but, I just, it's really hard to give it up. Because I don't want to stay in and be there more hours, and I don't want to be with a bunch of people again. And section work's hard, you know some of it is, like the dust, dragging about dust bags and...But this job's colder, you're out on the track sometimes, to get, you gotta move around on the track. It has its advantages and disadvantages but I just like the idea of, I'm movin', and I'm not, um, you know, on one piece of equipment, going back and forth.

As depicted in the statements above, career underground coal miners have opportunities to try out different positions and to find jobs that matched their needs, goals, and personality.

Repetition was not generally viewed as a disadvantage. Experienced miners were able to identify a career path and tailor their experience to their goals.

Develop skills and reputation. All participants described skills development as a major part of their career path and identified the importance of not only skillfully doing their jobs, but of developing a reputation for being able to do their jobs well. Participant 4 described how his reputation as a skilled manual laborer brought opportunities to advance, even though he was not actively seeking such opportunities:

The first fourteen years I was just a regular worker... you know I'd run machinery, I was a general laborer, I did the whole thing. The guy that owned the coal mine approached me one day and asked me to go get my fire boss papers, and I did. . . . I went and did that. And then he asked me to go get my foreman papers, and I did. . . . And, I also know, I would never got this job if I was a bum. You know, your reputation follows you. You're first job might be from your education, but after that, it's on what you've done.

As opposed to Participant 2, who actively sought promotions to management and administrative positions, Participant 4's career was marked by several promotions that were based on his reputation.

Gaining a reputation as a skilled and hard worker was a way to further one's own career, as well as the career of others, such as family and friends. Participant 5 noted that he would use his reputation to recommend others for jobs, but only if they met his standards:

Well, the situation I'm in, like I said, I've always done the best so they know—I don't mean to be bragging, but, I could probably count on one hand how many people I've recommended but they *will* get a job. Ok? And I've never recommended anybody that... they've got to meet my standards, ok? And they know that.

Each participant described a period of skill-development that required years of manual labor, and they took pride in these experiences—and the reputation they built—as part of their coal miner identity.

Integrated identity. As participants gained skills and comfort in their varied positions, they described an integration of their vocational identity with their other identities (e.g., male, West Virginian, Christian, father, etc.). Even participants who were now retired or working as trainers still strongly identified as “coal miners” in the present tense. Participant 6, for example, described his strong affiliation with his coal miner identity, in spite of his time away from the work.

P6: I like coal mining. I miss coal mining. I...uh...every now and then we'll go to a mine and go underground and, yeah it's all there, it's...Could I go? I could go back tomorrow.

S: Do you think you have to love it in order to stick with it?

P6: I think probably 98% of the people do. To some people I think that it's just a job that they go to and...yeah, but not many. . . . I think you do. And again I can't speak for everybody but...like I said I could go back tomorrow.

Here, Participant 6 has clearly made the distinction that coal mining is not “just a job” for a majority of miners. His love for the work made it more meaningful, and he identified the mine as “home.”

Similar emotional attachments to coal mining were described by all participants. As elaborated by Participant 8, work became a part of him—something he didn't need to think about, no matter what position he was in. It was seamlessly integrated into his life:

I guess the thing that I liked about it as much as anything was probably, I went to work every day six, seven days a week, you know. Got my foreman's papers, fire boss form. Did a lot different things, you know, worked on different jobs, the whole works. But...the biggest decision I had to make every day was whether I was going to take a Twinkie or Hostess cupcake in that bucket. You know, just show up every day, work for eight hours, and come out, take your shower and go home. I loved it.

While the integration of vocational identity may have come at varying times in their development, experienced miners all described a merging of their identities as “coal miners” with their understanding of self, particularly in relation to their cultural identity. As stated by Participant 7, “if you're gonna live here, this is where you're from, this is what we do.”

Work-home balance. All participants reported their vocational identity to be an integral part of their whole person; however, this identity was necessarily adjusted once they went home. Finding a balance between work and home emerged as a significant intervening condition, though there was a wide variety in how miners established this balance. Maintaining a

separation between work and home was highlighted as essential by a significant number of participants, and intervened in the way that mining influenced participants' lives.

While many of the participants described healthy and happy relationships with their spouses or significant others, seven participants identified strong feelings regarding how much of their work life they would share with their families. They established strong boundaries in this regard by only sharing minimal details about their experiences, and they were especially tight-lipped if they were experiencing periods of significant stress or increased risk.

Participant 2 described just such a time in his career when he returned to work after being injured on the job. After stating that he never spoke to his wife about work, he provided this example of the conflict that could result when home- and work-lives clashed:

Eh, I didn't think she'd understand. . . . You know she's not very mechanically inclined. And she didn't like me going out all hours of the night and she would, a lot of times, yell at me for leaving. She had a temper about her. When I got these two fingers cut off, I was a shop boss that time, we were underground changing a final drive on a Marietta miner and we were carrying it back to the track and I couldn't go anymore and I I told my buddy, . . . he was a lot bigger than I, I said, "[Buddy], I can't hold this anymore," I said, "I'm gonna drop this thing." So I dropped it and where I dropped it there was a rail, and it cut those two. And I told [buddy], I said, "Hey [Buddy] I think I cut my fingers off." "Aw, bullshit you didn't cut 'em off" and I said, "Yeah, I think I did. . . . I said, "Yeah I think I cut 'em off, [Buddy]." And so we got out close to the tippie and uh, and it was a fall that, on the loading track, we couldn't get outside. Had to get across the fall and um, emergency wagon was out there waiting on me and [the doctor] put 'em back on . . . So, I was in the hospital for a week and then my boss called and wanted me back to work on

Monday. And doctor told me not to get ‘em dirty, said, “You might lose your fingers if you get ‘em dirty, so,” he said, “Well, you can sit outside,” and so I called my boss . . . I said, “I guess I need to come back to work.” . . . I can remember her, I said, she said, “Where are you going?” I said, “Work.” “No, you’re not going to work.” I said, “Yeah I’m going to work.” And so I walked and [my friend] came and he was parked out there . . . and she threw something out our window she was so mad! I said, “I gotta go.” I said, “You don’t understand [wife], you don’t understand the pressure you got.”

Participant 2’s wife reportedly felt highly protective about her husband’s health, and he ultimately responded to her concerns by trying to avoid the subject of work altogether. He noted that while she supported his career, his wife did not understand the nature of the work, the pressures involved, nor his dedication to his work.

Participant 4 described a similar feeling, noting that it was important to create a boundary between home and work. When asked if he ever spoke to his family about work, he stated:

I never bring it up. If they ask me something I’ll tell ‘em. Yeah, I don’t go in and say “Oh I’m gonna to tell you some coal-mining stories today!” You know? I don’t do that. I always felt . . . work is work. You know? That’s what you do. Then you come home and try to forget. And I mean, not forget, but you got to separate it from whatever.

A significant number of miners spoke of the need for this separation, for various reasons. While participants spoke of other strategies for work-home balance, creating a boundary between home and work emerged as the only consistently significant intervening condition.

Disadvantages. As stated above, most participants chose not to speak to their families regularly about work, and this appeared especially true in reference to risks they faced in the workplace. The hazards of coal mining, though often attractive to participants, were

acknowledged as necessary disadvantages to their work. Two hazards in particular—*danger/risk* and *demanding schedules*—were explored by a significant number of participants, and intervened in their conceptualizations of the meaning of coal mining.

Danger/risk. When asked if they considered their jobs dangerous, participants responded with varying levels of agreement. The word “dangerous” in and of itself was not always endorsed, and six participants expressed hesitancy about defining underground coal mining as unavoidably life-threatening. All participants did, however, recognize risks to safety on the job, and a significant number of participants had been injured in the mines. Their relationship to the risks of underground coal mining was one of the most frequently mentioned themes in the data, by all participants.

Six participants’ perceptions of the risks of their jobs were influenced by their early exposure to mining disasters, or the deaths and/or injuries of family or neighbors. Participant 3 described vivid memories of a mining disaster that occurred when she was 14 years old, and which killed several of her neighbors. She noted that the dangers of mining, even when one grows up around mining, cannot truly be understood unless one actually works in the mines:

every time the, like, stuff starts happening and all these explosions—people just thinks, Oh my God these eight people got killed here, 20 people got killed there. Why’s those people go down in there? What do they even go in there for? It’s because they don’t have no understanding of what it is. And like I said even me, I didn’t. When my dad told me those guys, our neighbors were trapped I’m like, “Well why don’t they go in there and get ‘em out?” I had no clue, until I worked there, what really happened. And I don’t think I ever woulda knew. Even if someone told me a hundred times, ‘til I got in there and see how the air goes, there’s fresh air here, there’s bad air over here, there’s a

constant air flow here, and if that fire gets in that, and that smoke comes, you don't, I mean, if it overcomes you, and if you, now we got 90 minute rescuers, where used to we had just a few minutes, you know. And there, that time thing will allow you to, you know, maybe be saved or someone to get to you those trackers are gonna be able to find you. And 'til you understand it, you could talk about it all day, but it's really hard for someone that's never been there. And it was for me too.

As stated by Participant 3, non-coal miners hear about the dangers of mining and wonder why people are willing to go underground. However, once she became a coal miner, the exposure to these risks reportedly made more sense.

Participant 6 was the Safety Director for a mining company when they experienced a large explosion with significant losses of life. When asked how this event affected him, he noted the short- and long-term influence this experience had on his career:

S: How did those tragedies like [mining disaster] or even just having one man die . . . how did those affect you?

P6: You know, you try to tell yourself it don't. But it does. It, I mean...you, you can't help it. When [mining disaster] happened...when they called me that morning I was actually home eating breakfast, and they called and said, you know, "We've had something happen. We're not sure what it is yet. We've got miners unaccounted for. We need you up here." So of course I jumped in my truck and took off, and when I got to the mine, my boss, which was the head of the whole safety said, "I need you to go to the church and stay with the families." So I was with the families through this whole thing. You know? Answering questions, actually, and, you know, then the deal came through they was alive and then they wasn't alive and, it uh...it was a tough situation I

mean there's no two ways. I'll never forget driving home from [mine]—that it seemed like it took me...*days*. Like I was never gonna get home, you know? It was like four o'clock in the morning and it just, it seemed like I drove forever and I couldn't get home. And then, like I said, then later on in the year I had a guy killed in my mine I had to go in and get, and, uh, I was just ready to get out for a while, it was...*[long pause]* Bad times.

S: Did you ever talk to anybody? Like did you talk to your wife about what was going on?

P6: No, I never really have and you know they wanted to send us to talk to people and...*[shrugs and looks away]*...which on that, you know it's been...like the guy that got killed at my mine, he was 34 years old. And the next day I had to go open his locker for his wife to get his stuff out, and I gotta stand there, and you know you...that's not good, man. It's not good. So...*[long pause]* when I saw my opportunity to leave, I left.

Depending on their relationship to the mine, those participants that spoke of mining disasters recognized impacts on themselves, their families, and their communities. However, Participant 6 was unique in identifying a direct link between the risks of mining and his desires to retire from mining.

While all participants reportedly knew of different mining disasters growing up, most of them noted that the idea of danger was either exciting/attractive, or that they never really thought about it. As stated by Participant 8, thinking a lot about the dangers of the job would be counterproductive: "I'll be honest with you, I never worried about being killed. I never worried about the place blowing up or anything. I think if you do those kind of things you'll be miserable as a coal miner." However, all participants had experienced severe health issues due to their work in mining, experiencing such traumas as loss of appendages, chronic back pain, head

injuries, and black lung. Participant 2 described not only the pain he had experienced due to his diagnosis of black lung, but due also to the company's refusal to find him a job on the surface or—after 20 years in mining—to provide health benefits related to his diagnosis:

And so I've been battling, 19 years, let's see, it's going on 19 years now for my black lung. I've won so many times and they've appealed it and took it away from me . . .

Well, I think that's another thing, that you grow up in West Virginia and you got this loyalty? That if you're loyal, I always...you know my dad told me, when I went, he was a union man and so he told me when I told him I was going salary, and he said, "That's fine," he said, "but don't never forget where you came from." And I never did forgot those words . . . And yet, you know you try to be loyal and give a good day's work and you know make a profit for the company you have to make the company a profit or they're not gonna stay afloat and you know I was always taught that but then when this happened it was just like the balloon was punctured and all the air went out of the of the sail.

All participants identified that one of the major inherent risks of the job was working for a mining company, who were ultimately only concerned with the bottom line. As stated by Participant 4, "Somewhere along the line you got to understand—if the black stuff don't hit the ground, they don't need you. You gotta get the black stuff out there." In spite of these hazards, all participants made a point of stating that the majority of physical injuries sustained on the job are not due to the nature of the mines; rather, they can be attributed to human error.

Personal responsibility for safety. In describing the risks of mining, all participants indicated a strong belief in their personal responsibility for safety in the mine. The human element was broadly acknowledged as the most important aspect of risk reduction, far more

important than regulation or policy. Participant 7 described the different elements of safety in the mine:

There's those three big P's—policies, practices, and procedures. Policies and procedures are words on paper where they're verbalized. But if practices aren't what they should be, then that's all that it makes policies and procedures is words on paper. Period. Same thing with mining law. You know, yeah, you're supposed to do A or B, no oversight, no regulation or nobody cares, or somebody wants to take a shortcut, or by ignorance.

Doesn't matter what the books say. And just like anything else...we're the most regulated industry in the country, mining is. We're double regulated, state plus the feds. I mean, it's to the point to where, you could make it almost impossible for somebody to blow their nose in a mine, but...there is always still the factor of human error.

Each participant expressed a similar sentiment. While all participants endorsed that mining conditions *could* be dangerous, they all identified individual abilities to minimize or even eradicate these risks through conscientious attention to safety. In keeping with cultural values of taking care of friends and family, participants all spoke about the need to be safe for their own sake as well as for the sake of their co-workers and families.

Demanding schedules. Valuing their role as providers and caretakers also influenced the way participants described their demanding schedules. Participant 1 succinctly described a typical work schedule: "There's no such thing as a 40 hour week." In reference to the long hours required of crew members, Participant 8 noted that "you spend more time with them than you do with your family," and later joked that his now-grown son once said, "Dad, I didn't know who you was 'til I was five years old." Participants noted that typical schedules involved working between ten and fourteen hour days, six or seven days per week. These hours often incorporate

overtime, and every participant reportedly took these hours in order to make more money. As previously discussed, participants all valued the money they could make in the mines; however, they were all keenly aware of the time commitment required in order to earn their living.

Participant 5 stated, “Any mining—there's never a, there's no eight to four. There's a lot of money, but you're going to put in a lot of hours.” All participants reported a willingness to work these hours in order to provide the life they wanted for themselves and their families. The significant amount time they spent underground at various times in their lives emerged as an important intervening condition in the perceptions of coal mining.

Pride. *Pride* was a strong thread connecting participants’ descriptions of regional culture, vocational identity, and individual experiences. All participants reported a keen awareness not only of their feelings about their own culture, but of the way their regional and vocational cultures may be perceived by those outside of them. Three domains emerged as intervening conditions within this awareness: *love for way of life*, *awareness of stereotypes*, and *feeling misunderstood*.

Love for way of life. Participant 3, who loved to travel, stated, “you can still go places, but you always—there’s nowhere like home.” Love for the region—with its unique terrain, people, history, and values—was mentioned by every participant. When asked to identify what they loved about the Appalachian way of life, participants mentioned the slower pace, traditional values, close interpersonal networks of friends and family, proximity to nature, low levels of crime, and shared systems of belief. As previously discussed, participants also talked about coal mining as integral to this way of life. In describing the place of coal mining in the West Virginian way of life, Participant 7 noted “it is part of that culture, old and young they share that. To where there’s a pride. And I see that a lot in West Virginia. These folks here, in this state,

are very prideful about being in coal mining.” While two participants noted that they would be willing to move away from the region permanently, the rest reported no desire to do so, unless it was to be closer to grandchildren or for only part of the year.

Awareness of stereotypes. Participants’ love for the Appalachian way of life was colored by their awareness of positive and negative stereotypes about their culture. All participants described a range of stereotypes to which they had been exposed, though no single stereotype was consistently noted by a significant number of interviewees. Participants identified several negative assumptions made by people from outside the region, using terms such as “poor,” “slow,” “uneducated,” “backward,” or “hillbilly.” They also identified positive stereotypes such as being “laid back” and “friendly.” Four participants mentioned frustration with negative portrayals of Appalachian people, and coal miners in particular, in the media. Interviewees also recognized the close connection outsiders may see between the region and coal mining. Participant 4 described the way that the media can contribute to negative stereotypes about coal mining and the region in general:

S: . . . what do you think people from outside of Appalachia think about Appalachia?

P4: Oooh, my God! You know they all think that we all live in some kind of coal shack.

They all think we're dirty, we're dumb. And I have to say—this is me personally, not anybody else—back in the day whenever we all used to go on strike and all that, it seemed like the news media would go to a bar, find the drunkenest coal miner they could find, and that's who they would interview. And you know what happens when you're drunk, even if you're an intelligent person, you know? You're saying all this and you're going all that and—that used to *burn* me more than anything, because, as you well know,

I hope you know, you know, of course there are some dumb coal miners, but you know that most of us are probably more educated than other places, or other people.

Participant 4's comment is representative of the frustration expressed by a significant number of participants, who strongly identified as being misunderstood in both their cultural and vocational identities.

Being misunderstood. The theme of being misunderstood emerged in both individual and cultural contexts with almost every participant. Coal mining was identified as a thread that stitched these contexts together, and the ignorance of outsiders created clear boundaries between in- and out-groups. Participant 3 articulated these differences, noting that coal mining's influence on the culture runs deeper than "tradition" and therefore cannot be understood by those who were not raised in the area:

But, I believe that people that don't know don't understand because they've never been through it and they don't, it's not a, not just a tradition, but they've not been brought up in the coal fields to understand what really goes on there. They just think, What are you doing in there? You get hurt or killed and you're askin' for that. That don't know that that's the way you have to live and that's what you live. . . . what resources you have is what you gotta live by. . . . But if, you know, they don't understand it because they've never been in it and they don't know it.

All participants noted that coal mining is often misunderstood even by people raised in the area, with a family heritage of coal mining. Participant 7 spoke to this lack of understanding, and shared that his mother—who was born and raised in the area and was married to a coal miner—lacked an understanding of the culture of the mines:

Even the people around here that's never been in a mine or around it, even if their family's worked in 'em...my mother for instance, had to go underground [for her job]. It was a little opportunity, she wanted to see what Dad did. She had no idea! She's tellin' Dad all this stuff and he's laughin'! He said, "I've been doin' that for years!" You know, we're this, we're a high tech thing, you know what I'm saying? So once the people actually get around it and they understand a little bit about the process and how it makes this area click, I think they soften up to it a little more, and I think they have a tendency to respect it a little bit more.

Being misunderstood by people both inside and outside of the culture resulted in desires to educate others not only about the technical aspects of coal mining, but what being a coal miner means to these individuals. When asked what he wished people understood about coal mining, Participant 6 stated:

That we aren't just a bunch of dumb hillbillies! That there is a lot of intelligent, hardworking people that are coal miners. I think they don't think we have any education, and . . . I wish they understood that it's not like that.

This desire to be understood and respected emerged as a significant intervening condition in the data across participants.

Summary of intervening conditions. Participants described a number of intervening conditions that influenced the way that they viewed their cultural and vocational identities. Four domains, in particular, emerged from the data as significant: *experienced miner development*, *work-home balance*, *disadvantages of coal mining*, and *pride*. As part of experienced miners' development, they were able to explore a number of different jobs, to build skills and a reputation, and to integrate their identity as coal miners into their self-concept. Participants also

described the ways that their identity as coal miners was expressed differently with their families in order to maintain a balance between work-life and home-life. Their identified reticence to speak about work at home was particularly salient when discussing matters related to the hazards of coal mining. All participants identified the risks inherent in coal mining, while also emphasizing a personal responsibility for safety. Finally, pride emerged as an important intervening condition. As coal miners gained an understanding of their vocation and incorporated it into their identity, they experienced a deepening in their love for the Appalachian way of life, in their awareness of stereotypes, and in their desires to be understood. These conditions intervened in the development of each participant's cultural and vocational identities.

Interactions

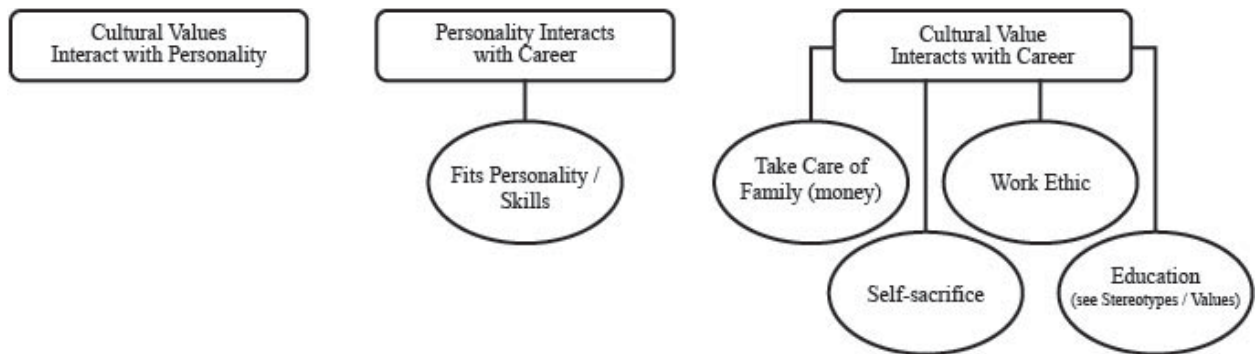


Figure 5. Actions / Interactions

In exploring the relationships between vocational development, cultural identity, and the meaning of work among Appalachian coal miners, three primary interactions emerged. The data reflected significant interactions between cultural values and participants' personalities, between their personalities and their careers, and between cultural values and career (see Figure 5). The relationships between these three domains provided the foundation for participants' definitions of the meaning of work.

Cultural values and personality. There was significant overlap between the way participants described their cultural values and the way they described themselves. Cultural values of family, work, egalitarianism, and independence were reflected in the ways participants defined goodness and the proper way to interact with others and their world. The most significant overlap was found in the cultural value of “taking care of family and friends,” which was reflected in a number of self-identified personality characteristics, including goodness/decency, work ethic, people skills, and helpfulness. Obviously, it was also reflected in the family-focus described by a significant number of participants as key to their personalities. These interactions were a significant influence on the meaning of work.

Personality and career. The interactions between participants’ personalities and their career as underground coal miners were highly significant. All participants identified some kind of “fit” between their personalities and their careers. As described by Participant 6, this fit was intuitive: “it just kinda felt like that’s where I should be and I never did leave.” Participant 3 put it this way: “But it’s just, you know, what you are is instilled in you of what you wanna do and what you wanna be. And what you want out of life.” This instillation of values, and the effect it had on both personal and vocational identities, was noted by a significant number of participants, including Participant 1.

Participant 1 described the formative influence of watching his father, a creative and charismatic man, fail repeatedly in his career. He recognized similarities between his own personality and his father’s: both were highly creative, but his father reportedly lacked “follow through.” Coal mining provided an opportunity to employ this participant’s creativity:

Coal miners are . . . *versatile*. You know? Being the world that it is underground, and you know you can’t, like, go to the hardware store and get some nails or something to do

a job. You make due with what you got, you know, so there's some imaginative stuff that [laughs] takes place. Alright? I learned um, I learned how to jerry rig a lot of stuff, you know, so, they're innovative.

It also provided the opportunity to succeed where his father had not, by providing the opportunity to demonstrate commitment and follow-through:

That's where I wanted to be different, you know, I wanted to—that's kinda ingrained in me, too, you know, crazy ideas and . . . different stuff. But I wanted, I wanted to kinda like, you know, take that lesson from Dad and *do it*, you know? I mean you only live once, you know, might as well, you might as well do it.

As stated above, every participant identified ways that his or her personality was a good fit with their career, and the interactions between the two contributed significantly to their meaning-making process.

Cultural values and career. The interaction between Appalachian values and the work of underground coal mining emerged as highly influential, particularly the values of taking care of family and friends, self-sacrifice, work ethic, and education. For example, Participant 6 spoke of how the value of taking care of others influences his work underground:

You gotta depend on each other down there so you do learn that part of it, you know, of if my buddy needs help I help him, if I need help he'll help me. Yeah, I think it kinda, you kinda gotta depend on each other down there, it's...it's not a one man show that's for sure.

While taking care of each other was an important value both above and below the surface, taking care of one's family was always on the forefront of participants' minds.

Participant 4 provided some insight not only into the interaction between career and caring for others, but between career and cultural views on education:

And, I know that money is not everything, but you know, for havin' really no education, or uh, a high school education, I make more money than a lot of people that have been in college for their whole . . . I've made more money in...you know...if you would talk to teachers, I can remember when I was just startin' in a mine maybe a year in the mine—I was just a young fella—I couldn't understand why teachers hated coal miners. Well, now you know, I understand—because we actually made more money than they did back then, for no education whatsoever.

Here, Participant 4 demonstrates a fundamental dynamic between education and coal mining: on the one hand, participants highly valued education, and many of them had college degrees. They also encouraged their children to go to college and viewed their children's college educations as important. However, given the lack of well-paying jobs in the area, coal mining also provided a place for anyone to come and work, as long as they could learn the skills. In this way, opportunities to mine coal created a disconnection between the cultural value on education, and its application. It also created opportunities for participants to work with people of all different educational levels, thus creating a workforce that necessarily practiced their values of egalitarianism.

Summary of interactions. The interactions between culture, personality, and career provide fertile ground for the growth of meaning. The impact of coal mining on individuals, families, and communities was felt through these interactions, the nature of which exemplified the complexities of participants' identities and meaning-making. Through in-depth examination

of these interactions, participants provided a framework for the examination of the meaning of their work.

Consequences: The Meaning of Work

In describing the intersections of culture, personality, and career, participants consistently located the meaning of their work in six domains. Each of these domains acted as a construct within which the act of coal mining took on greater significance: family, survival/power, self-determination, social connection, personal identity, and cultural identity. Each of these domains, with their contributing themes, will be explored (see Figure 6).

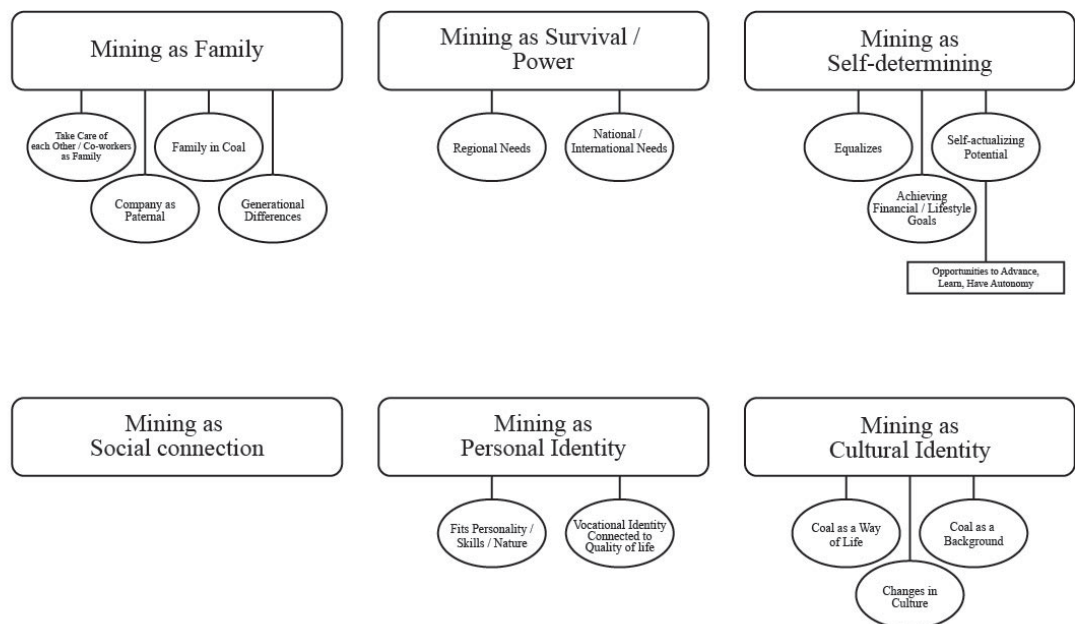


Figure 6. Consequences: The Meaning of Work

Mining as family. Family, as discussed previously, was a defining cultural and personal value of all participants, and was evident as an important construct in the meaning of work. Participant 8 summed up the bond between miners by comparing it to a family bond:

We all have different hobbies, different home lives, you know. . . . But if somebody in this group, something happens to them—everybody else comes together and if we need to do something we do it. That's how it is. Kind of like a coal mining family.

Aspects of this value were highly salient in the ways that participants described their motivations for persevering in their careers, and their feelings about their jobs and co-workers. Four of these aspects were identified by a significant number of participants, and will be described below.

Take care of each other. The value of taking care of each other was consistently mentioned in the data, echoing ways that participants spoke of their families: participants came to view their colleagues as people who would give their lives for them, and for whom they would do the same. All participants identified the need to take care of each other, and to have others take care of them, as a necessity on the job. As stated by Participant 5: “We need to watch out for everybody . . . Everybody needs to watch out for everybody.” However, the need to take care of each other in the face of significant danger was described as more than just a part of the job: it ultimately gave their work meaning. Participant 2 described his admiration for coal miners’ self-sacrifice, noting that coal mining requires the willingness to sacrifice one’s life:

I do, I still admire people that go underground every day, and I consider coal mining next to prostitution, about as close as you can get. Because I feel that those guys go underground, face those environments, you don’t know whether or not, you know, you’re gonna get injured, come out dead, or you don’t know what’s going to happen—whose gonna make a mistake, and uh, it only takes one stupid idiot in there to do something that everybody’s gonna regret.

Working in such life-or-death environments, where “you don’t know what’s going to happen,” reportedly heightened the emotional experience of trusting one’s co-workers, and deepened the respect that coal miners have for one another.

Participants described their commitment to taking care of co-workers at the expense of themselves. Participant 6, in a typically self-deprecating kind of way, put this care for each other in context by describing the number of times he would go into a dangerous situation in place of one of his men:

P6: Right. Yeah, I’m not sendin’ you, but I’ll go. . . . [laughs] That’s stupid isn’t it?

S: I think it’s...

P6: You know, after I said that—yeah, I’m not gonna send in, but I’ll go! But you know how many times have I done that? Countless, you know?

These conditions also reportedly created a type of kinship among participants that some compared to the bond between combat veterans. This comparison was made by Participant 1, for example, who spoke with great emotion about the sacrifices of coal miners:

It’s shocking to me that kids in this county right here don’t even know about Monongah, you know?⁶ . . . [tearing up] They don’t even know about it. I mean, 360 guys killed in mine explosions, you know? They have no idea. I mean, not to mention the rest of the country and the state, you know? . . . I mean, why? I mean I think those guys should be honored. I mean, you know, I have to reign myself in, you know, every once in a while, when there’s a discussion of like, veterans and coal miners. I mean, absolutely I know I have the utmost respect for veterans. I mean, what could be more dangerous than that,

⁶ The Monongah mine disaster took place on December 6, 1907 in northern West Virginia. While most reports indicate the 360+ miners died that day, recent scholarship indicates that more than 500 miners may have lost their lives (see McAteer, D. (2007). *Monongah: The tragic story of the 1907 Monongah Mine disaster, the worst industrial accident in US history*. Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press).

you know, literally putting your life on the line, and getting shot at? . . . But coal miners are right in there I think. You know? I mean you didn't have anybody shootin' at you, but, I mean if you, I have no doubt—I don't have the numbers off the top of my head—but I have no doubt that it probably exceeds ten to one the number of fatalities you know in this four or five county area, coal miners versus veterans. You know what I mean?

The feelings expressed by Participant 1 typified the frustration expressed by several miners about recognition of their sacrifice—of themselves, their friends, and family—which also seemed to deepen feelings of in-group (i.e., coal miner) attachment. The willingness to take care of each other, even to the extremes of putting one's self in harm's way, contributed significantly to the meaning of work as family.

Company as paternal. Several cultural and personal values contributed to another aspect of coal mining as family—the extension of the family structure to participants' conceptualizations of the coal company. While participants recognized the nature of coal mining as a business, they also expressed beliefs that the company was morally obligated to take care of its people, much as a father might care for his children. A significant number of participants identified feeling both gratitude and disappointment in local coal companies: participants were quick to acknowledge the contribution companies made to their communities, but they also expressed frustration that companies did not seem to reflect the participants' degree of loyalty and sacrifice. Such mixed feelings were identified by Participant 8 in describing the ways that coal companies influenced his hometown:

And you know as far as the town that I grew up in it's not the same town today. When [company] took that mine outta there they cut the heart of the town out. You know, [company], we were used to relying on them. If the school needed a swing set made,

they made one that lasted 30 years. Anything you asked them to do, they were very good to the community. Ah, but when they left it really cut a lot of the tax base out, a lot of the things that we did in that town.

Similar sentiments were echoed by a seven participants, who recognized that the people's reliance on the company did not engender a mutual response. Participants described ways that the companies represented (and still represent) the "heart" of communities; however, as stated by Participant 7, they ultimately did not feel any moral obligation to care for their people:

Morally, it's not right, but ultimately it's dollars and cents. I don't care what anybody says. These outfits say it's moral but it comes down to, what does comp cost? What does a fatality for a 20-year-old widow cost for the next 45 years? I'm not dumb.

Participant 8 echoed these moral judgments in reflecting on a large mining company that had recently declared bankruptcy and was attempting to negotiate with the union to get rid of miners' retirement funds and other benefits:

In looking at that I think the bad part I've got out of mining, I probably have distrust of a lot of coal companies because I've seen what they've done to people over the years with that there. I think one thing probably in any job you go and I think in mining it's the same way, if you think you're anything more than a check number, you're thinkin' too highly of yourself. Because they can shut down and they'll just tell you that's the end of it, and you're done. But that could be anything not only mining with that thing there. I don't think that somebody should work their lifetime for a company and then the company say, "We're bankrupt and we can't do anything for ya, and we're not goin' to take care of you through health care," and stuff like that. I think that's wrong. Totally wrong!

As mentioned by Participant 8, three participants noted their difficulty in getting medical benefits from the company—benefits they felt they deserved for their loyalty to the company. Perhaps the most poignant was Participant 2, who was in a 20-year battle with his former employer in order to get benefits for his black lung. His father, a coal miner for 40 years, had died after contracting black lung and being denied benefits. Participant 2 spoke of his disillusionment with the coal company he had worked with for 23 years:

Because I thought if anybody had the secure job, and I would tell people I'd say, "The company'll never get rid of me I'm too valuable for 'em," but when the liability issue came, where I became a liability and not an asset, they turned 180 degrees, and it was just like night and day.

Participant 2 described a number of the personal and cultural values (taught to him by his father) that contributed to his view of the company as paternal, including work ethic, egalitarianism, and taking care of each other. Taken together, participants' consistent descriptions of their disappointment in companies' lack of loyalty toward their workers reflected unmet expectations of paternal care.

Family in coal. The meaning of coal mining in participants' lives was significantly influenced by the fact that all of them had family members that had worked in mining, if only for a short time. All participants expressed pride in the generations of their family that worked in the mines. Participant 1, who had distant relations who had worked in coal mining, provided a telling description of the meaning of being in a coal mining family:

What I'm getting at is I think there's something to be said for miners' families, you know, young kids who have grown up in a coal mining family and stuff . . . I think there's, you know, there's still—in this area anyway—there's a pretty strong tradition

you know, whatever, heritage, whatever young kids feel that they kinda want to, like, be a part of it . . . Now there are, you know, young guys that aspire to coal mining as a career just because they're in the region I think—some good ones—but again my perception, I think it's mostly the family connection and if it's not, generally speaking, I don't think, they don't last, you know? They don't feel that deep commitment or whatever.

As previously discussed being part of a “coal mining family” was a point of pride, and, as described by Participant 1, created a sense of “deep commitment” to the work. Thus, having family in the coal mining business significantly influenced the meaning of work.

Generational differences. As stated previously, six of the eight participants were over the age of 55, and the youngest participant was 39. Each participant was asked if they saw a difference in the ways that younger coal miners approached their work. All participants identified differences between their generation and those who were entering the field after them. The significant majority observed a difference in work ethic, noting that, in their opinions, younger miners did not have as strong a work ethic. When asked if there was a difference, Participant 4 answered strongly in the affirmative:

Yeah, there's a difference. Like I said, just that the things that the old guys would do to get it done. Now there are some young guys, I've seen some young guys come into the mine that are great! And then I've seen some come in there like, “The world owes me a living.” I've seen guys in the mine for a month, the boss tells ‘em to do something, they say, “I’m not doin' that.” I’m like, what?! If I’d a done that I’d a been gone. You know, like, What? What do you mean you’re not doin' that? Yeah there's a, there's a difference.

These identified differences provided a view into the meaning of mining among participants in that they reflected the way participants valued their work, and the ways that they would sacrifice for it, within the context of their generation.

Interestingly, the differences identified in the younger generation of miners were reflected in some of the ways that participants talked about their children. Participant 4 went on to state that differences in family and upbringing are reflected in the ways younger miners approach their work:

I don't know if it's for the fact of what I said before about, you always want your children to be better than you or have more than you? Is it because they're being spoiled to death now? I'm going to tell you something I believe in. And, not that I do it, but I believe in this—this "time out" and all this stuff—like I told you, I got beatings. You know all this "time out," [*sarcastically*] "Oh gee! If I did something wrong I gotta go stand in a corner!" Hey, come on! If I did something wrong, I got my hind-end beat! There's a big difference there, I ain't going to do that shit no more.

While not all participants drew these conclusions explicitly, a significant number identified differences in work ethic, including a lack of willingness to sacrifice their personal safety or comfort for the job. As stated by Participant 6: "I think they grew up easier than we did, and I think it really affected the way they think the world should be."

Mining as power & survival. Participants were all highly aware of the connections between their jobs and the energy needs of the nation, not to mention the financial needs of the region. The role of coal mining in maintaining the nation and the region was a matter of pride for a significant majority of miners, and easily fit under Blustein's (2006) themes of power and

survival. Participant 5, who became a mining instructor after retiring from working underground, described the way he tried to instill pride in the men and women he trains:

I've tried to stress to them, to show them in mining that, uh, not to be ashamed. You can be proud of what you're doing! Okay? Because you are, you know I tell 'em, don't ever, you know, don't let anybody put you down, because you're doing something that no one else...a lot of people can't do. . . . I show them a map and put a dot up there and say, you know like, "Does anybody...Do you understand how much electric-, like coal, how much of electricity in this country does coal produce?" Where, at that time it was about 50 percent. Some of them don't know that. So it's about 48 I think, now, ok? "So, in other words, you're producing energy for this country 48 percent. You take away that 48 percent right now, and what do you got? You've crippled a country. So you're doin' a good...you're providing energy for this country."

The pride expressed by this participant provides a window into participants' understanding of their *power*. They expressed a broad understanding of the energy needs of the United States, and of the way that their work provided for those needs. This understanding, however, was marked by significant concern about the future of coal, and recognition of the controversy surrounding it: all participants predicted a decline in coal production in the future. Participant 1 expressed deep misgivings about this decline, but also noted feelings of inevitability:

I just think it's on the way out as a profession and an industry, I mean, it's just an uphill battle—just the public sentiment, the regulatory environment. Right or wrong, you know, and I think it's wrong myself, but I think it's a losing battle. You know, I think, I mean and it's a shame because, I mean, I personally think, you know, coal could be the answer to a lot of the country's problems energy-wise, you know? There just, there really is a

big supply of it. Um, but I think it's gonna get pushed out of existence before the supply is used up.

In spite of these concerns, participants' pride in their contribution to the national economy was a significant theme in the data.

Similar pride was shown by all participants in regards to the Appalachian economy. As part of the interview, all participants were asked about the possible regional impact if coal mining were to fade away over the next couple of decades. Answers varied, with some miners stating that the region would be completely devastated, while others stated that the region could probably recover successfully. However, almost all (seven of eight) participants identified mining as a key to the *survival* of the region. Participant 7 described the connections between mining and the community, and predicted the domino effect that could take down the regional economy if mining loses its foothold:

It would be devastating. . . . You know, crime increases, drugs increase. Just all that tag stamp that goes with lower prosperous areas go in. And then, the support businesses that spring up. People don't understand that. You know? [My uncle] and whoever owns . . . the donut shop down there. Yeah, the gas is ten cents higher but it's convenient: I'd stop and get my coffee and get my paper and BS with him on my way to work, to and from. It's convenient. It's an income for those people. How about those people that services, you know, the equipment and all the aspects of what we do in mining? That's very important. What about the guy removing the timber? Or the guy on the reclamation projects trying to make these places look better than when they did remove things? . . . But what about the timber company? You know what about the guy driving the truck that's payin' for that? You see how this all connects and how it could be a snowball

effect if the coal industry gets compromised to a large degree. I would like to see the amount of people in southwestern Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio and let's just say northern West Virginia. How many jobs are related to coal? . . . But I could see it being devastating.

Generally, participants recognized that they had some of the highest paying jobs in the area and thought that the business of mining—and the consumption habits of miners—employed far more people than others may understand. On both national and regional stages, participants identified the power of mining, and its contribution to the survival of the current economy, as personally meaningful.

Mining as self-determining. Participants' exploration of the meaning of mining was significantly influenced by perceived opportunities for self-determination, or self-direction. The theme of self-determination was taken from Blustein's (2006) theory of the psychology of work. This theme emerged in three areas: mining as an equalizing opportunity, mining as a way to achieve financial and lifestyle goals, and mining as an opportunity for self-actualization. Each of these areas highlighted coal mining as a context within which participants felt empowered to make choices based on values, identity, beliefs, and goals.

Equalizing. As discussed earlier, participants were acutely aware of the limited vocational options available to them and the negative stereotypes of the region—particularly with regards to educational and financial opportunities. All participants identified mining as a way to put themselves on an equal playing-field with anyone, regardless of their socio-economic status or level of education. The equalizing influence of a job in coal mining seemed to mirror participants' reported value of egalitarianism.

This aspect of self-determination was often mentioned in relation to perceptions/stereotypes of outsiders. For example, in describing how coal miners are often viewed as poor and uneducated, Participant 4 stated, “I know that money is not everything, but you know, for havin' really no education—or a high school education—I make more money than a lot of people that have been in college.” Participant 6 echoed this sentiment in a story about his reaction to a taunting fan at a football game:

I'll tell you, and maybe I shouldn't say this because this is...I was at a football game or college in [WV town] and [home team] was playing and they was playing a team from Pennsylvania . . . And, there was a guy beside me, he was probably 23, 24, whatever. “Oh look at the referees! They ain't got no teeth!” and just stuff like this the whole time. And my dad and his wife was there with me, and she said something to me, and I looked at him. I said, “You know what? I make a hundred thousand dollars a year; he never made nothing more than minimum wage. You think he bothers me?” And he kinda just shut up, you know. So.

All participants saw mining as a way to equalize whatever differences, or disadvantages, they may have experienced.

Achieving financial/lifestyle goals. As may be noted in the quotes above, participants expressed pride in their abilities to make a good salary as coal miners. While participants saw money, in some aspects, as an equalizing factor, they also saw it as the means by which they could achieve the lifestyle they wanted. Participants spoke of their ability to take care of their families' health and comfort, as well as their ability to engage in hobbies, leisure, and self-improvement in ways that felt personally fulfilling. Participant 3 articulated her gratitude for her job and the opportunities it affords:

And I just try to be thankful I have a job and with decent insurance, and that my family can have the things, and we could, you know, it helped us go on trips and, and have, be a family, get our house, which I'd never been able to do what I've done.

Her statement reflects gratitude not only for having a job, but for the opportunities her job has afforded to "be a family" in ways that felt true to her values. In various ways, all participants described similar feelings about the opportunities mining afforded to live the lifestyle they wanted.

Self-actualizing. In addition to lifestyle goals, mining also afforded participants the ability to self-actualize, or to find personal meaning through cultivation of the self. For all participants, opportunities to learn, advance, and practice autonomy were meaningful aspects of their job. Participants thus identified mining not only as a means of making a living, but as a means of learning about themselves.

Opportunities to learn and advance were important to a number of participants, for example. Participant 2 talked about his desire to learn every aspect of mining in order to become the kind of boss he wanted to be:

And I always wanted to, I learned, I was a quick learner and I held all the jobs as an hourly employee so I could learn what it took to operate that machine and all that. So I did all that and learned it 'cuz I didn't want to be bossin' somebody that I didn't know what they were doing. And I took a lot of pride in that.

The values of learning and advancing were often tied together in participants' accounts.

Participant 1, for example, provided this description of what he enjoyed about a particular promotion:

Which that was also, you know, educational and eye opening and fun and everything, because you did more—you went to more than one mine, um, even other companies' mines and things and got to see different things and work on different technical projects, as directed by my boss, the vice president of operations, and um, so that was, that was educational and fun and everything.

In agreement with Participant 2, a number of interviewees spoke of the personal significance of learning: that it wasn't just about having a degree or knowing about the task at hand, but about being able to act autonomously to better oneself. Participant 5 elaborated on this value:

And then when I went with the company, um, you know I have to be honest, like, I didn't go to, you know, have a degree. You know? I want to use it somehow. You know, I want to better myself. . . . which I did.

Perhaps the most descriptive statement of mining as self-actualizing was given by Participant 7, in response to a question about what he gained from being a coal miner:

It forced me as a result of my circumstances to deal with all kinds, and I think that was my reward, you know, in the grand scheme of things—that, I wanna go here and do this, and God says, “You're gonna go here and you're gonna do this, you're gonna do this, you're gonna do that. And when you're ready, and if that's my plan, here you end up.” And it forced me not to quit. Because I wanted to quit. It forced me to examine myself. Where I thought I had strong points maybe I didn't. You know it was a vetting for me, so to speak. It was an awakening for me in a lot of ways.

Participant 7's experience in the mines reflected the sentiments of a significant number of participants, in that his work provided opportunities to learn, not only about the job, but about himself.

Mining as social connection. Participants all reported strong connections to the people with whom they worked. “Social connection,” while similar in many ways to the concept of “mining as family,” nonetheless describes important distinctions related to the Appalachian way of life and the sociological concept of “social capital.” As described by Bell (2009), *social capital* implies two concepts: the benefit of access to resources due to social networks, and organizations of norms, trust, and cooperation, including “the role . . . in facilitating collective action among citizens,” (p. 632).

While not all participants endorsed spending significant time with each other outside of work, they all described feelings of trust, cooperation, and caring for one another both in and out of the work environment. Participant 8 shared a number of stories about support he received from co-workers, and became emotional when describing the deep connection he feels with his fellow miners:

I think you have friendships that start in the mine and last a life time. Long after the coal mine part of it is over. When one of us hurts about all of us hurts. That works, you know, at that mine. That’s it.

These feelings of connection, networking, and support manifested throughout people’s careers. For example, four miners mentioned connections used as social capital in order to find a job. All participants spoke of supporting each others’ businesses and families outside of mining whenever possible, even if it meant paying a little bit extra or driving a few extra miles to shop at a certain store. With regards to the social capital that facilitates collective action, there was not enough support in the data to make this its own subcategory; however, three participants spoke of the history of union struggles in order to ensure rights for miners, and six participants spoke of

ways that mining enforces and challenges social hierarchies (however, these data were often conflicting in nature, and thus were not included as their own subcategory).

In general, all interviewees echoed feelings of connectedness and support. As previously discussed, the values of family—the most salient value discussed by participants—and taking care of family influenced participants' connections with their co-workers, resulting in meaningful and enduring networks which allowed increased access to resources both inside and outside of mining.

Mining as personal identity. Seven of the eight participants talked about coal mining as if it were literally a part of them. For example, Participant 2 stated: "I really, I think it gets in your blood." Participant 1 echoed this when he quoted Johnny Cash:

Dark as a Dungeon, you ever hear that song? . . . There, there's a line in there like, uh, "The stream of your blood runs as black as the coal." . . . it like gets in your blood you know? Like a, you get a, a *lust* for it—I think he uses that word in one of his songs. But, um...and it's true. I mean, I can see that.

Participant 3 stated: "I think you have to get it in your blood, or have it in your blood. I don't just think everybody can do it." This recurring idea of coal mining as an integral part of participants' being gave rise to the theme of coal mining as personal identity. Coal miner identity was predominantly evident in descriptions of the correspondence between participants' personalities, abilities, or natures, and their work underground. Coal mining thus became a milieu in which participants' identities could not only be expressed, but also appreciated. Because of this blurring of identities, coal mining inevitably influenced the ways that participants perceived the quality of their lives as a whole. Each of these constructs—the fit between

personality and work, and the influence of vocational identity on perceived quality of life—will be discussed below.

Fits personality/abilities/nature. The concept of mining as being a good “fit” for interviewees was one of the most prominent descriptions in the data. Participant 5 said that “If you like something that you do, it's not work,” and a significant number of participants echoed this sentiment about mining, noting that coal mining fit who they were as people and what they could naturally do. Each participant spoke of ways that their unique identity not only fit with their work, but also contributed to their vocational success.

One example of a fit between personality and work was provided by Participant 2. He provided several examples of the way his “type A personality” fit his job not only as a coal miner, but as a longwall foreman. In particular, he noted the importance of his competitive nature:

I'm a type A personality and . . . my main concern was to get her back in coal, quick as possible. . . . Me and my friend used to joke—he was my section boss, longwall boss—and we used to go golfing after he got laid off and then after I got my, before I got transplanted [*referring to his lung transplant*], we'd go golfing. I said, “You know, [Friend],” I said, “We don't even make good golfers,” I said, “Because we're trying to figure out how to get around this course faster than anybody else!” [*chuckles*] And I was always that way, when I first went section boss on the longwall, I had—I kept charts at home—tons, machine, shift, and all—and I would work on that every day before I went to work to see where I was at on the totem pole. . . . Yeah. Yeah. I was competitive.

Similarly, Participant 4 talked about his personality as someone who liked taking risks, and who sought adventure, and how this fit perfectly with his identity as a coal miner:

This might sound goofy to you. I loved the danger involved in it! I don't know why.

When you're young though, nothin's gonna hurt me! Nothin's gonna hurt me. I loved the fact of the danger involved in it. And you know people used to look at me and say [*in incredulous voice*] "You're a coal miner?" Even today people, if you're out somewhere [*incredulous voice*]: "You're a *coal* miner?" Yes, I was.

For this participant coal mining provided a sense of danger, which suited his personality, and also made him feel unique and special, which also suited his nature.

Throughout the data participants identified ways that their personalities and abilities fit seamlessly with the demands of their job, and provided opportunities to express their unique identities. This fit blurred the lines between vocational and personal identity. As stated by Participant 6, who hadn't worked underground in several years, "I guess the mines will never leave me." In other words, their connection to mining colored participants' lives beyond the boundaries of the workplace, and extended to the ways they perceived their lives as a whole.

Vocational identity connected to quality of life. Participants noted that when they felt good at work, they felt good about other areas of life. Conversely, when things weren't going well at work, and especially when they were laid off or underemployed, six participants noted significant decreases in life satisfaction. The latter scenario was particularly salient in the data, and participants linked these correlations to issues of identity. Participant 8 provided perhaps the best example of this connection in describing the reactions of several of his colleagues after the shutdown of a larger mining operation:

Let me give you an example, perfect example that relates to what we're doing. . . . When they [*mine*] shut down, a lot of the guys that had worked there worked there all their lives. They was 55 to 59. Couldn't get social security. All they got was a little pension

from the company. You don't know how many funerals homes I went to . . . I really believe stress got several of them. Where am I going to turn? What am I going to do? You know? If some of 'em were lucky enough that their wife worked and had a pretty decent job, they was alright. But these other guys had been the bread winners and their wife had stayed home with the kids and raised them. And they was going down it was him and her, you know. It was very stressful, no doubt about it.

Descriptions of the pain of layoffs provided particularly thick descriptions of the connection between personal and vocational identities. As stated by Participant 8, participants viewed their identity as coal miners as inextricably connected to their roles in their families. With *family* as the most salient value documented in the data, changes in vocational status directly influenced participants' views of their ability to live a life in line with their values. Personal identity as coal miners thus significantly impacted their perceptions of quality of life.

Mining as cultural identity. All participants spoke with passion about the connection between coal mining and the culture of the Appalachian region. As has been shown, participants felt deeply connected to coal mining as part of their unique individual identities; however, this connection extended to their identities as people from Appalachia. This connection was highlighted in three different domains: coal as a way of life, coal as a battleground, and the changing role of coal in Appalachian culture.

Coal as a way of life. While the connection between coal mining and the Appalachian way of life has already been highlighted, participants' descriptions of these links within their vocational contexts were uniquely personal. Generally, all participants agreed that energy and money were the foundation of this relationship, and provided the base upon which other cultural structures were built. Whereas non-miners may objectively understand the region's association

to the industry, participants expressed a personal investment and sense of responsibility for this relationship.

Participant 3, who at the time of the interview shoveled coal on the midnight shift, six days per week, spoke passionately of the relationships between her abilities, her work, and people in Appalachia:

It's our way of life. It's how we make our money. It keeps the heat on, it's electricity, it's your lights. Instead of shipping everything overseas, like they even still do, if they keep it right here it could be a major resource. . . . Coal burns hotter than gas. And, I mean it's your hot water to your house it's your electricity. I mean, if they get rid of coal, you know, you could take a, they always say take a shower in the dark or [*chuckles*] you know, a *cold* shower in the dark! And I think people don't understand what it really does. . . . For an outsider to understand it, you'd almost have to go in there and see it. It's not nothing like you think. I mean, you go in and it's white because the walls there's dust, rock dust on everything. But where they're actually mining the coal you can see. And when you can see that coal comin' down through there, tons of it, and you know the money it can make. And not just the money, but the place we live in, because we spend, we buy groceries, the guys going to the work stops at the stores they buy chips, pop, snuff. They, it makes our community and our, the [town] where we live in, and the place we live in, money. And the people that live here to buy things, to have things, and so we can, even though we're in a small area that maybe people thinks is backwoods or whatever, you know in legal things, in close knit things, and you have to be in that family to under- or really understand it. I mean anybody can tell you anything but you it's just something you gotta feel inside your heart.

This statement provides a window into the interconnections between coal mining, regional needs, and personal survival. Participant 7 echoed this statement and clearly identified coal mining not just as a way of life, but as the primary way life in the area is sustained at all because of the lack of other opportunities:

These folks here, in this state, are very prideful about being in coal mining. And that is a common denominator, between the two. The difference is, is that for that young person trying to start out, this is the industry that they must engage in, in some regard because they won't make the wages doing anything else. Even in the support of this [*i.e., jobs that support the mining industry, but are peripheral*], it's lower wages than the actual involvement in mining and that process. And, so that's something. The older guys will tell you, "Well that was the opportunities we had, similar to you—if you were gonna stay here back then." I'm stuck with it. Well, but I'm glad I did it. I made a good living over the years, put my kids through school, and they put their value there.

This participant's statement was echoed by all interviewees in different ways: the connection between the industry and the region, between the industry and individual success, and between the industry and cultural values (*i.e., family and education*).

Changes in culture. Participants described significant changes in the industry and Appalachian culture that have influenced the connections between them. A number of changes were mentioned, though none repeatedly enough to count as a significant theme in and of itself. The theme of change, however, was highly salient. Participants noted increases in federal and state regulations, intrusive management styles, workers' levels of education, use of machines instead of manual labor, and drug use. They also identified decreases in safety risks, discrimination, prevalence of smaller "mom and pop" operations, general respect for their work,

and overall production. For better or for worse, ongoing changes in the industry were viewed with apprehension due to their capacity to change not only coal mining as a whole, but the individual lives of the participants, their families, and their communities.

Coal as a battleground. Because participants viewed coal mining as creating and sustaining the Appalachian way of life, they were also highly sensitive to perceived attacks on the industry, and were quick to defend it. As stated by Participant 3,

I believe that all resources on earth—coal, wood, and all these things . . . I just think those are resources that God gave us, and gave us the knowledge and the opportunity to be able to use ‘em and understand ‘em.

Generally, all participants felt that coal mining was misunderstood or falsely portrayed on the national stage (i.e., politics, environmental initiatives, etc.). In reference to media coverage of mining, for example, Participant 5 stated “a lot of the stuff, most of it is not true.” Participant 3 corroborated this statement, noting, “I believe that the people in the media, or anywhere else that says things, really don’t understand what it truly is.” This misinformation contributed to participants’ feelings of being misunderstood, and under attack.

While participants reported feelings of frustration with the media, they expressed deeper concerns about the federal government. Six noted not just their skepticism of government support, but professed beliefs that the federal government was actively working *against* the industry. However, in spite of this “us/them” binary and the negative feelings it caused, seven participants recognized a need to change in order to keep up with regional, national, and global demands. On the other hand, interviewees recognized the detrimental tendency of the industry to be slow to adapt: “The mining industry is not very proactive but we’re reactive as all get out,” (Participant 8). Interviewees all identified the benefits of coal as outweighing its costs, but also

recognized a need to adapt in order to minimize negative consequences and the need for help in order to make these adaptations.

These beliefs were clearly expressed by Participant 4, who explored the place of coal mining on global, national, and regional stages. He noted that the industry helped build this country, and may now need the nation to return the favor:

If you're going to give money to all these other nations, how about giving the coal operators or the power plants the money to put these scrubbers and stuff in that they need instead of just putting all the rules and regulations on 'em and tell 'em, "You can build all you want to, but I'll bankrupt you." Well, what is that? You know, I agree with the clean, the clean...but help us! Don't stab us in the back! After we've helped, I don't want to say totally, but after we've helped make this nation what it is with *our* coal, *our* power, *our* steel, and all that. Wha-, what are they doin' to us? You know, I don't get the big picture, 'cause I'm not up there. I'm just a basic small time person. I don't know what the big plan is, and all that stuff, but, help us! Don't kill us!

This plea from Participant 4 was echoed in different ways by different participants, all of whom felt that the consequences of the current political climate were not only dire, but imminent.

Although two participants felt strongly that the region could recover well from a loss of coal mining (Participant 1 stated: "It depends how the powers that be play things. I think [*this area's*] got the capability to survive. Very well in fact"), the majority of interviewees (six) were concerned that the Appalachian states could become "ghost state[s]" (Participant 5) without the industry. The following statement by Participant 6 reflected a number of the themes brought up by others:

I mean, they're never going to change my mind about coal mining I don't care who it is or what they say. Do I think it's unfair? Totally . . . I tell you what—I have been a Democrat my whole life. And this is the first year I've ever voted for a Republican president. So that should say a lot in itself. For some reason this administration's on the attack and I don't understand why. I really don't. If we lose coal in West Virginia, they just as well bring all the other waste from the rest of the states and just dump it here and use this for a landfill. I mean, we got nothin' else.

Because of the enormity of the stakes, all participants viewed the future of the region as hinging on the future of coal, in one way or another, and viewed themselves as on the front lines in this battle for Appalachia.

Summary of consequences: The meaning of work. Six categories emerged from the data as constructs within which the act of coal mining took on greater significance. Participants identified coal mining in the same terms as their most deeply held cultural value: family. They identified disappointed expectations of the coal companies as paternal figures, and developed relationships with co-workers that resembled that of kinship. Participants also identified coal mining as a means by which they have access to national and regional power structures by providing for energy and financial needs (survival/power). Participants viewed coal mining as providing opportunities for self-determination, particularly in relation to aspects of class, education, and lifestyle. They also identified meaningful social connections with co-workers, who provided tremendous support both in and out of work. Finally, participants spoke of coal mining as being inextricably tied to both their personal and cultural identities.

Summary: Findings

The grounded theory of how vocational and cultural identities influence the meaning of work among Appalachian coal miners emerged from the interactions of participants' personal, vocational, and cultural identity development. Participants' early exposure to coal mining influenced their understandings of the relationship between the industry and their communities, as well as between the industry and their vocational opportunities. This early exposure took place within the contexts of values taught to participants by their caregivers. Values such as family, education, work, money, egalitarianism, and connection to the region influenced participants' identities and plans for their futures.

The contexts within which participants developed their values and vocational identities were both shared and unique. A majority of participants shared demographic factors such as ethnicity and religion, and most were male, though there were some important differences. Other important contextual factors were participants' personalities, such as being "good," having good interpersonal skills and a strong work ethic. Participants also strongly valued independence and were comfortable with traditional western expressions of masculinity. Finally, participants' early career experiences, both positive and negative, also provided context for their perceptions of the core concept: underground mining.

Intervening conditions included factors that influenced participants' views of themselves and their work as they gained life experience. These conditions included growth in their vocational identity due to experiences in the mines. They also included participants' attempts to balance their work and home lives, their personal exposure to the hazards and difficulties of coal mining, and their growing pride in their way of life and awareness of how they and their profession may be viewed.

The data showed that all of these factors interact with one another to varying degrees: cultural values interact with personality, personality interacts with career, and career interacts with cultural values. The consequences of these interactions were seen in the way participants made meaning of their work. The meaning of work among participants was located in six domains: mining as family, mining as survival/power, mining as self-determining, mining as social connection, mining as personal identity, and mining as cultural identity. Within each of these domains, participants described why their work was meaningful to them, to their families, to the region, and to the nation. At the intersections of values, identity, and culture, participants found what made their work meaningful to them.

CHAPTER 4

Discussion

This study is the first to explore the connections among Appalachian cultural identity, vocational development, and the meaning of coal mining. By exploring the function of culture in miners' career development and in the creation of personal and collective meanings, this study provides a unique contribution to the counseling psychological literature, which has strongly advocated for the study of work as central to understanding human behavior within cultural contexts (Blustein, 2006; Blustein & Noumair, 1996; Porfeli, Lee, Vondracek, & Weigold, 2011; Raskin, 1994; Thompson & Subich, 2011). It is also one of few studies that explore the psychological life of working-class men and women, and the only study that explores the specific psychological life of coal miners in Appalachia, a region with a distinct history and culture. As such it provides unique insights for psychological researchers and practitioners about cultural and vocational identity development, especially as they relate to regional and familial values and the integration of work-life identities.

Using grounded theory analysis, five pertinent questions guided data collection: 1) how do participants describe their cultural values and identity; 2) how do the participants understand their experiences with coal mining throughout their lives; 3) how are participants' individual identities reflected in their career; 4) what do the participants perceive as uniquely valuable about their culture, both regionally and vocationally; and 5) how are these values reflected in their perceptions of what makes their work meaningful? Generally, participants' responses seemed to echo Studs Terkel's (1974) assessment that work is "a search for daily meaning as well as daily bread, for recognition as well as cash, for astonishment rather than torpor; in short, for a sort of life rather than a Monday through Friday sort of dying" (p. xiii). Participants described

interactions between personal, cultural, and vocational identities that significantly impacted the meaning of work on a number of levels. Far from long-standing stereotypes of coal mining as mindless or oppressive, participants identified their work as providing opportunities to develop and integrate their identities, to live their values, and to contribute to the world around them. Participant-defined meanings of coal mining work developed out of the action and interaction of influential conditions, contextual factors, and intervening conditions.

As indicated in the findings, participants' early and ongoing exposure to coal mining provided some of the influential conditions that impacted their understandings of the industry and the dynamic relationships between coal mining and Appalachian communities, families, and individuals. The credibility of these relationships was established when six or more participants independently indicated the significance of these relationships, particularly within the contexts of familial and cultural values. All participants identified values such as family, education, work, money, egalitarianism, and connection to the region as highly influential in their individual and vocational development. Given previous identifications of Appalachia as an "individualistic subcollectivistic culture . . . that espouses collective ideals within an individualistic worldview or society," (Rieder Bennett, 2008, p. 254), the espousal of such values and their common influence was not surprising. However, participants' descriptions of their early exposure to coal mining provide the first exploration how this industry-saturated culture may influence individual and vocational identity development.

While all participants reported an early awareness of coal mining, many of them still attempted other careers or educational pursuits prior to committing to a career in the industry. This seems to both confirm and expand elements of social cognitive career theory (SCCT; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994), which posits that children and adolescents develop interests, make

educational/vocational choices, and create expectations about future career performance outcomes based on individual and contextual factors (Ali & McWhirter, 2006). While all of these participants ultimately worked in mining, their responses seem to indicate that in spite of limited options they did not experience early foreclosure on other options. In fact, several participants spoke of seeking other opportunities until well into their 20's; however, participants also dependably responded that they were aware of limited vocational options in the region. Therefore, the degree to which "person inputs" and cultural context influenced foreclosure and career development is a subject that would benefit from further inquiry.

Contextual factors that emerged from the data included demographic and personality factors, as well as reportedly similar early experiences in the field. Given participants' later assertions that coal mining fit their personality, these factors appear to be especially salient in exploring both individual and vocational identities. While most participants acknowledged some discomfort with making general statements about "all coal miners," they were able to quickly identify aspects of personality that were common in their co-workers, including *goodness* or *decency*, *interpersonal skills* (i.e., ability to read people and interact effectively, sense of humor), *work ethic*, *independence*, and *comfort with traditional masculinity*. While all participants identified money as a motivating factor for a career in coal mining, their descriptions of what makes a coal miner unique reflected the more collectivistic values of their culture. As such, the descriptions of coal miner personality established how participants identified their vocational group identity: they had a *cognitive* understanding of membership within a group ("self-categorization"), they were able to *evaluate* the group and assign a certain value to group membership ("group self-esteem"), and they also developed an "affective commitment" or *emotional* bond to the group (Ellemers et al., 1999). These cognitive, evaluative, and affective

descriptions of coal miners demonstrated an attraction and significant bond to a group that verified participants' self-concepts as good people with strong family values, work ethic, and traditional gender identity. Vocational identity and personal identity were thus stitched together with common values and experiences as the binding thread.

Given that participants were relatively similar in age, gender, religious affiliation, and socio-economic background, they already coincided in a number of group identities. Since only one woman was interviewed, no conclusions could be drawn about significant gender differences in levels of group identification. In addition, racial minorities have a long history and current tradition of working in mining, but all participants in this study self-identified as white. It is hoped that future research may explore the impact of previous group membership (e.g., racial identity, gender identity) on self-categorization, group self-esteem, and affective commitment among Appalachian coal miners.

The impact of group identity on self-concept and self-expression was highly salient in the analysis of intervening conditions. As participants reflected on their mid-career experiences, they identified a number of important conditions that influenced their ongoing identity development and integration. As experienced miners, they had a solid understanding of the opportunities, advantages, and disadvantages available in their careers. Many had experienced promotions and opportunities to advance. Many had also experienced significant injuries and mining disasters. They had adapted their vocational identity expression to different contexts (i.e., home vs. work). Throughout all of this, their pride in their "way of life" deepened, as did their frustration with being misunderstood by outsiders. Participants' adaptability and growing pride appear to fit well with Dawis and Lofquist's theory of work adjustment (TWA; 1984),

which posits that the correspondence between a worker's skills and the working environment's compensation/system of reinforcement leads to work adjustment and satisfaction.

While a number of intervening conditions could provide fertile ground for future research, two conditions seemed to have immense potential for exploratory work: identified responses to the *disadvantages* of mining and the impact of participants' *awareness of stereotypes* on their identity development. In completing the pilot study prior to this research, the question "Has there ever been an adverse event in your personal work history or in the industry that made you consider leaving mining?" was contributed directly by a former miner, who also expressed strong interest in how participants may answer. The question was subsequently added to the interview protocol for this study. All participants spoke of the hazards of mining on both a personal and industry-wide level; however, no participant endorsed these hazards as causing a strong desire to quit. Further exploration into the psychological mechanisms that enable coal miners to adapt to safety risks could contribute to research on not only identity development, but to issues of resilience and coping. As to the second area of potential future research, *awareness of stereotypes*, this study seemed to only scratch the surface of the impact of positive and negative stereotypes on vocational development. Further research may explain ways that such stereotyping influences self-concept and development.

While the interactions between influential conditions, contextual factors, and intervening conditions provided the foundation of the grounded theory, the ways that participants described the meaning of their work was dependent upon their perceptions of their career decisions, resources, problems, and successes in relation to their cultural world. These relationships were thus best understood using a constructivist perspective that explored participant experience through meaning-making paradigms (Schultheiss, 2007). As anticipated, participants' responses

reflected Blustein's (2006) three psychological meanings of work: survival and power, social connectedness, and self-determination. However, participants identified three additional meanings of coal mining in addition to Blustein's original three: mining as personal identity, mining as family, and mining as cultural identity.

Some of the most salient themes to emerge from the data were the concepts of coal mining as foundational to participants' identities as individuals, members of families, and participants in Appalachian culture. Coal mining was, as several participants phrased it, "in the blood," seemingly as much a part of their self-concept as their regional or cultural identities. This idea supports the work of social psychologist Ellen Langer, who has indicated that separating "work" identity from other identities denies the needs of the whole person. In a recent interview, she stated: "you should get to the point where you're treating yourself, whether you're at work or at play, in basically the same way," (Tippett, 2014). Participants' values-driven motivations and actions across life domains indicate that such work/life integration was taking place. Throughout the data, participants' responses were commonly linked to core values, such as egalitarianism, family, hard work, education, and caring for others. Moreover, these values were endorsed with equal fervor in talking about their regional culture, their families, or their vocation, thus possibly indicating the same developmental needs and identity expression in both "work" and "life."

In spite of this integration, participants often described complex—and even contradictory—emotions about the role of coal mining in their personal and familial lives, as well as in their relationships to their co-workers, their communities, and their country. As stated by Freese (2003): "Coal has always been both a creative and a destructive force. It is the tension between the two that makes the story of coal so compelling," (p. 14). Within participants'

families, these creative and destructive forces seemed most salient in the areas of safety and stability. Concerning safety, all participants personally knew men and women who had been affected by mining disasters, or had themselves experienced significant injuries or coal-related health issues. However, all miners spoke of safety in terms of personal responsibility, and thus did not think of mining or even the mining companies, *per se*, as responsible for injuries. Rather, they generally viewed themselves as in control of their physical safety (as stated by Participant 8: “It’s almost like the injury that I received was my fault, it wasn’t the company’s fault,”) and thus danger did not contribute significantly to their feelings about their work. In placing these statements within an identity context, this seems to indicate that threats to life and limb were not necessarily threats to identity, since these threats were generally viewed as within participants’ control, and thus were (arguably) considered a manageable risk.

Job stability, on the other hand, was spoken of not only as a significant risk, but as a risk to participants’ way of life and sense of well-being. The negative impact of layoffs was mentioned by every participant, often marked by feelings of fear, betrayal, depression, and loss. While the intensity of these feelings varied (e.g., from Participant 3’s statement, “It’s almost like you missed it,” to Participant 8’s, “I never had anything in my life ever bothered me as much as when they laid me off,”) all participants noted periods of unemployment or under-employment as extremely difficult psychologically. In fact, when exploring whether or not they would encourage a loved one to enter the field, many participants cited job stability—particularly under the Obama administration—as reasons they may attempt to dissuade someone from a coal mining career.

The impact of job stability appears securely connected to values, as well: if one’s most salient cultural and personal values are expressed through one’s role as a provider, the loss of

one's ability to provide would suffocate significant aspects of values-based self-expression.

Within the context of identity construction, this seems to indicate that under-employment or job loss directly threatened participants' self-concept, and was reportedly far less psychologically tolerable than a loss of health or mobility. Unlike issues of safety, participants conceptualized job stability as somewhat outside of their personal control, and thus as a threat to their agency. The self-determining aspects of mining, which a significant number of participants found to be highly meaningful, could thus be undermined by powers beyond their control.

The concepts of job stability and threats to participants' cultural and vocational identities were especially prominent in exploring the possible future of coal in the United States. All participants predicted a significant decrease in coal production over the next several decades. While very few could even imagine a world completely devoid of the Appalachian coal industry, participants were keenly aware of perceived misunderstandings of the coal economy and of threats to their "way of life." The role of coal miners as contributors to the national economy was a point of pride and frustration: participants were acutely aware of the changing landscape of the industry on both micro and macro levels, and of the arguments used on either side to both defend and protest their way of life.

Participants reportedly located themselves at the center of this changing landscape, and identified strong feelings of being misunderstood and unfairly targeted by those on the periphery. They expressed concern for the survival of their way of life, which most participants viewed as in inevitable decline. As of this writing, these fears may be justified: the Obama administration has endorsed sweeping regulatory changes to the coal mining industry as proposed by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA; United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2014). In response to a changing climate, the EPA has proposed to cut carbon pollution from the

power sector by 30%, which would significantly impact coal production. In an industry already threatened by the growing dominance of natural gas, participants expressed fear, sadness, and frustration about the future of their industry. However, in keeping with subjective uncertainty reduction theory (Hogg, 2000; Hogg & Mullin, 1999), rather than reduce participants' allegiance to their social group, these threats seem to have resulted in stronger group identity. Participants reported strong defensiveness of their identity as "coal miners," which could arguably be due to feeling increasingly uncomfortable degrees of uncertainty about the place of their way of life in the national economy. No matter the changes to come, participants' identities as coal miners were securely established.

Limitations

While the qualitative and constructivist nature of this study provided room for in-depth examinations of complex and value-laden phenomena, its limitations must be acknowledged. The very "in-depth" nature of this study may inhibit the scope of its investigation: the questions focused on relatively introductory examinations of participants' values, and the study focuses on a very specific area of social concern (i.e., a specific set of workers within a well-defined region). Given the self-selecting nature of the sample, descriptions of participant values—particularly those values founded in helping others and education—may not generalize to other coal miners, or people in the region. Thus the substantive nature of this theory would require ongoing refinement in order to build in the direction of a formal theory. As part of this refinement, implementation of emergent analyses on sampling methods would broaden the conceptual area of the theory by including interviews with more diverse subsets of workers.

In addition, while the study was open to any miners in the Appalachian region, all of the participants interviewed came from West Virginia and Pennsylvania, and spent the majority of

their work lives in West Virginia. Given the fact that participants acknowledged differences between these states, and differences even between regions *within* the state of West Virginia, it is not recommended that people assume these cultural, personal, and vocational identities connect with regions not represented. As previously discussed, the relative racial and gender homogeneity of the sample may limit the depth of this particular investigation.

As in any qualitative study there is also the reality of researcher bias, which has (without doubt) influenced the grounded theory. As stated previously, my foundational assumptions before starting the study included beliefs that cultural identity influences vocational choice; that the influence of Appalachian culture would be identifiable in participants' language; that participants would describe relationships that reciprocally influence the meaning of work in ways that reflected human drives for survival, for social relationships, and for self-determination; and that all work is meaningful because vocational identity is essential to understanding a whole person. In conducting the interviews, other biases surfaced: in spite of my research into the daily workings of a typical underground coal mine, I was surprised by the variety of jobs available underground, and by the number of opportunities to gain new skills. I was also anticipating significant difficulty in getting participants to open up, due to my position as both an outsider and an academic, and due to the values-laden nature of several of the questions. However, I was greeted by all participants with warmth, openness, and a level of description that seemed to indicate previous personal introspection on these matters. Finally, the impact of my presentation as a white, cis-gendered woman was not examined. This may have influenced levels of rapport (both positively and negatively) as well as influencing participants' openness about their experiences.

Strengths of the Study

In spite of its limitations, this study provides unique and powerful insights into the psychological interconnections among individual, vocational, and cultural identities in the Appalachian region. Participants' openness and introspection allowed for in-depth examinations of these interactions in both inter- and intrapersonal contexts. Thus, while generalizing these specific findings may not be recommended, the uniquely complex nature of the data is what generates a more accurate reflection of the people being studied.

In addition, the exploratory course of this research benefited from participants' own words, rather than preset answers. A more deductive and objective dataset, no matter how replicable or well-researched, could create structural bias that led away from the truth as seen by participants. As Gergen (2001) stated: "if language is the means of conveying the content of mind to others, then language becomes the bearer of truth," (p. 804).

In a study exploring values and identity, participant language was essential; thus the interviewees themselves were the study's greatest strength. Every participant spoke of his or her experiences in ways that acknowledged complex emotions and an understanding of cultural contexts. The researcher was able to meet with every participant face-to-face, thus respecting the cultural value of *personalism* (Keefe & Greene, 2005), which built trust between the researcher and the subjects. Several participants also commented on feeling comfortable with the researcher, noting that she acted "like a person" and did not "put on airs" (Participant 4), which reflected a mutual value of *egalitarianism* (Keefe & Greene, 2005). All participants but one explicitly stated that they enjoyed being interviewed. The personal connection developed between the interviewer and the interviewees is a chief strength of the study, and fostered more open responses and thicker descriptions.

Additionally, this study is the first of its kind to examine the internal lives of underground coal miners within the contexts of culture and identity. As previously noted, there is a dearth of psychological research on the lives of working men and women, and calls for increased investigation have yet to lead to an influx of research on the subject (Blustein, 2006; Flores & O'Brien, 2002; Hoare, 2002; Kenny et al., 2003; Porfeli, Lee, Vondracek, & Weigold, 2011; Sokol, 2009; Subich, 1996; Thompson & Subich, 2011). By exploring the actions and interactions between career, culture, and personality, this study adds a unique voice to the psychological literature by examining a "class" of worker that is usually overlooked (Blustein, 2006; Fouad & Brown, 2000). The findings appear to support previous research on social class and work role salience (Brown et al., 1996; Diemer & Blustein, 2007); occupational expectations (Diemer et al., 2010); vocational aspirations (Ali & McWhirter, 2006; Ali & Saunders, 2009); views of the world of work (Chaves et al., 2004); occupational self-concept implementation (Blustein et al., 2002); and work as an expression of skills, abilities, interest, and values (Dawis, 2002; Holland 1997). While participants generally acknowledged having limited occupational options, the study provides strong evidence that their work is intensely meaningful, regardless of their access to educational and vocational resources (APA, 2006).

Clinical Implications

As reported in the findings, every participant identified money as their primary initial motivation for working in the mines. While all participants came to view coal mining as an important element of self-expression, the role of *coal mining as survival/power* was important throughout their careers. Blustein (2006) stated: "For [people] who are working primarily as a means of survival, the psychotherapy literature offers little informed scholarship to guide

practice,” (p. 228). It is therefore important to consider the broader clinical implications of this study of cultural and personal values, individual identity, and vocational identity.

If, as Blustein (2006) stated, “working is central to understanding human behavior and the context that frames life experience,” (p. 2), it would behoove clinicians to explore what clients find meaningful in their work, and how much their vocational identity interacts with their values and personality. Such explorations would be particularly meaningful within the contexts of clients’ values, identity development, and worldview. Each of these contexts is influenced by cultural messages given and received in several life domains, which points to the possible importance of assessing for the impact of positive and negative stereotypes about group identities.

Perhaps the most obvious applications of these explorations can be seen in career counseling. While it is not uncommon to assess which jobs may match with a client’s personality and interests, the role of client’s perceptions of certain occupations may cause them to foreclose on any number of options, even options that may fit with their personal and cultural values. Assessing a client’s beliefs about work in the domains identified in this study (work as family, work as survival/power, work as self-determining, work as social connection, work as personal identity, work as cultural identity) may provide a more in-depth understanding of what a client may find meaningful in a vocation, and help expand their understanding of their career needs.

While helping clients choose an occupation is one possible application of this research, it may also be applied to clients who are already established in their careers, both within or outside of mining. In working with a coal miner who recently was laid off, for example, this research would aid clinicians in better evaluating the far-reaching effects of job loss on personal identity.

Explorations into the ways the client made meaning out of his work, particularly within the areas described (mining as family, personal identity, etc.), could provide insights into planning individually and culturally appropriate interventions.

Outside of mining, a recent example in the researcher's own practice highlighted the importance of exploring the interactions between vocation, values, and identity. A client⁷ presented with significant symptoms of a Panic Disorder. His panic attacks had become so debilitating that he was unable to complete his responsibilities as a debt collector, and after almost two decades with his employer he was on unpaid leave for the first time. In exploring the client's presenting issues, he identified how his deeply-held values of caring for others—which he identified as typical in people from his native south-American country—felt stifled within a work culture that emphasized statistics and strict adherence to protocols. He also felt immense pressure due to a recent increase in supervisory monitoring of phone calls to debtors, which caused him to interact with callers in ways that he believed suppressed self-expression. By exploring these and other issues related to personal, work, and cultural contexts, conceptualization and treatment goals could be tailored to meet the client's individualized needs, adding to an evidence-based framework to create a meaningful treatment plan.

This study highlights the importance of exploring the meaning of work in individual and cultural contexts. By exploring the functions of culture, rather than treating it as a nuisance variable, this study provides a rough framework for therapy with working men and women of varied backgrounds. Therapeutic explorations of the meaning of work may assist clients in gaining insights and making changes—both at work and at home—that they find personally meaningful.

⁷ Identifying information has been changed.

Future Directions

This research supports the statement of Höpfl and Atkinson (2000) that “the power to define meanings” (p. 141) is the future of career psychology. The idea of career as a linear sequence of jobs denies the unique experiences of workers, whose cultural, economic, social, and historical contexts color every experience in and out of the workplace (Blustein et al., 2004). Participants’ descriptions indicated the significant impact of such contexts on vocational identity; however, this study only scratched the surface of participants’ experiences. Given the value-laden nature of identity, researchers may need to take extra measures to avoid treating participants’ culture as a nuisance variable. In order for this to be possible, it may be necessary for research designs to include some qualitative data collection to identify models that may not fit a given person or population. Future grounded theory designs would benefit from the use of ongoing comparisons to guide participant recruitment and saturation—purposive sampling could strengthen findings by including the voices of people with more diverse backgrounds (i.e., race, gender, SES) and opposite experiences.

With regard to the specific population of the region, the swiftly changing landscape of U.S. energy production indicates that there may be major shifts in the relationship between coal mining and Appalachian regional culture. As the role of coal energy changes in the next few decades, further research will be needed in order to understand the impact of these changes on the people of Appalachia. Participants identified a narrow range of lucrative occupational options in the area, a fact which has been established through research on the economic status of the region. On the other hand, important recent gains in educational attainment reflect the hope of many participants about the region’s ability to adapt and grow (ARC, 2011b). In order to bring in new opportunities, it may be increasingly important to combat negative stereotypes of

the region. In a recent interview on National Public Radio (NPR), high school counselor Michelle Harless in Kentucky made one request of the reporter:

I just ask when you portray us, please don't portray us as ignorant hill folk, I guess, because we are educated. We're poor, but we're educated, and everyone's pretty proud.

It's not a desolate place where no hope can be found. (Fessler, 2014)

Education, as reflected in this quote, was a guiding value for all participants. Many of the miners interviewed had college degrees, and continued their educations while working full-time in mining. Further exploration is needed in order to understand the value of education in the region as a whole. However, in an area where an industry has contributed so much to the cultural heritage of the people, it seems important to note the possibility that a strong vocational identity may be a regional value, which could contribute to a highly loyal and competitive work force for potential employers. By recognizing the strengths of the unique collectivist values of Appalachia, researchers and policy-makers may contribute to a body of work that encourages growth in the region.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has identified a grounded theory model for the complex and dynamic relationships between cultural identity, vocational identity, and the meaning of work among eight self-identified Appalachian coal miner participants. Through early and ongoing exposure to coal mining, the teaching of cultural values, and the assessment of vocational/educational options, participants' vocational and cultural identities seem to have formed simultaneously, though at varying rates of speed, throughout their lives. Common contextual factors, such as backgrounds, experiences, values, and personality traits, solidified participants' personal and group identities as coal miners. As participants gained experience in

the field, their personal and vocational identities became more intertwined, and their commitment to coal mining as a way of life deepened. Ultimately, participants found their work highly meaningful in six domains: mining as family, mining as survival/power, mining as self-determining, mining as social connection, mining as personal identity, and mining as cultural identity. These meanings, though unique to these participants, support relational and constructivist theories of vocational development, and encourage further exploration into the meaning of work among clinicians and researchers.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Semi-structured Interview Questions

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

- 1) Given the materials you've been given/our previous conversations, what is your understanding of the purpose of this study?
- 2) Where did you grow up? Has your family lived there for a while? What was it like growing up there?
- 3) What do you think is different about where you're from than other places in Appalachia? Other places in the U.S.?
- 4) What do you think you learned from growing up where you did that you might not have learned if you grew up somewhere else?
- 5) What do you think people from outside of Appalachia/West Virginia don't understand about people from Appalachia?
- 6) Would you ever consider moving away from Appalachia/West Virginia? Why or why not?
- 7) What did you know about coal mining when you were younger? Did you know anyone else that had been a coal miner?
- 8) When did you first start thinking about becoming a coal miner? What else did you consider doing, if anything?
- 9) Did you talk about your decision with anyone? What did they think?
- 10) What expectations about mining did you have before you started working?
- 11) What were you looking forward to as you started your job? What were you concerned about? Have any of those hopes or concerns changed?
- 12) Tell me about the kind of work that you do. How long have you been doing this? If I were to follow you for a couple of days, what kind of work would I see you doing?
- 13) How would you describe coal miners, generally? Is there anything about your personality that makes you particularly suited for this job?
- 14) How do you think people who aren't coal miners would describe coal miners? What do you wish people understood about being a coal miner, or about the coal industry in general?
- 15) Do you ever talk about your work outside of work? Who do you talk to? What kind of things might you talk about?
- 16) If a friend or family member was thinking about becoming a coal miner, what would you tell him or her?
- 17) Do you ever hear people criticize coal mining, or talk about possible dangers of the profession? Does it influence the way you feel about your job? How?
- 18) What do you get out of being a coal miner, good or bad, that you might not get out of other jobs?
- 19) How important is coal mining to your community? To Appalachia/West Virginia? How would the region change if coal mining were no longer a part of life here?
- 20) Is there anything that we didn't talk about that you feel I need to know about West Virginia, Appalachian culture, coal mining, or you?

Appendix B

Background/Demographic Questionnaire

Background/Demographic Questionnaire

Please answer all of the following questions as they describe you.

- 1) Age: _____
- 2) What is your religion? (If you do not have a religion, please indicate):

- 3) How important is your religious affiliation in your life?
 - a. Very Important _____
 - b. Somewhat Important _____
 - c. Neutral _____
 - d. Somewhat Unimportant _____
 - e. Not Important _____
- 4) Please indicate your primary racial identity:
 - a. White, non-Hispanic _____
 - b. White, Hispanic _____
 - c. Black or African American _____
 - d. Asian American _____
 - e. American Indian or Alaska Native _____
 - f. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander _____
 - g. Bi-racial (please specify) _____
 - h. Other: _____
- 5) What is the highest grade level/degree that your parents achieved in school?
 - a. Mother: _____
 - b. Father: _____
- 6) What were your parents'/caregivers' occupations?
 - a. Mother: _____
 - b. Father: _____
- 7) Please mark which of these statements best characterizes the financial situation of your family when you were growing up:
 - a. We were always financially stable and had more than enough. _____
 - b. We were financially stable and always had what we needed. _____

- c. We were financially stable sometimes, while other times we didn't have what we needed. ____
- d. We were financially unstable most of the time but we usually managed to get what we needed. ____
- e. We were always financially unstable and never had enough of what we needed. _